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HUNGARY AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

— George Schöpflin —

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PREFACE

In Europe the collapse of the communist system has given rise to great aspirations to democracy and civil rights. At the same time, new tensions are accompanying this move to democracy, whether in connection with the right to self-determination, minority rights, or the dissolution of former compound states - the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

In relation to these developments, Hungary occupies a central position: Hungary was for decades in the forefront of reforms and then of the peaceful revolutions of 1989; Hungary is the natural geographical link between the Balkans and Central Europe; and large minorities of Hungarian origin exist today in four of the countries bordering Hungary.

The Institute is pleased to have invited George Schöpflin of the London School of Economics to write this seventh *Chaillot Paper*. In it, he reviews past and present relationships between Hungary and its neighbours. Using the example of minorities of Hungarian origin, the author puts forward in particular a political reflection on contemporary democracy, in which the question of minorities is linked to that of citizenship, and not to ethno-national passions.

If the question of minorities is now crucial to the future stability of the whole of the European continent, this *Chaillot Paper* should, we hope, be an invaluable contribution to this debate.

Nicole Gnesotto
Paris, May 1993

PRELIMINARIES

The problem of the relationships between Hungary, its neighbours and the ethnic Hungarian minorities in those countries, although largely neglected in Western writing during the Soviet period, is clearly the second most sensitive security issue in Central and Eastern Europe after the war of Yugoslav succession; through this war, Hungary might indeed become involved. Unless all participants and the West understand the factors at play and pursue policies designed to minimise conflict, tension could easily rise with far-reaching consequences. Ethno-national disputes - and these are already entangled with other issues which are not strictly anything to do with ethnicity, for instance the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Barrage (GNB) - could readily engulf all aspects of inter-state and intra-state relations.

The role of the West in this respect is clearly a highly influential one, both as mediator and as a source of moral-political support for the democratic forces that are looking for solutions through negotiation rather than through zero-sum games and violence.

HISTORY

By the terms of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, *Hungary* lost about two-thirds of its territory to its successor states.⁽¹⁾ This constituted a twofold loss. Territory, meaning prestige, status and power, had to be ceded, but so also were large numbers of ethnic Hungarians, in flagrant violation of the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination. In Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon is still regarded as a major catastrophe for which France is held responsible as the patron of the Little Entente, and as the dominant element arising from the occupation of 1919. Many Hungarians are reluctant to accept that peacemaking in 1919-1920 was a crude process, legitimised in some respects by the principle of national self-determination, but based also on *realpolitik* and pragmatism. Even less do they understand that the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 lost Hungary whatever residual sympathy it might have enjoyed among the Entente powers.

The shadow of Trianon as the 'unjust peace' continues to darken Hungarian politics to this day. However, this is not intended in any way to suggest that Hungarian attitudes have remained unchanged since 1918. Between the two World Wars, integral revisionism ('return everything') dominated Hungarian thinking, but with the disappearance, as one of the consequences of the Second World War, of the *ancien régime* that had ruled Hungary since time immemorial, a metamorphosis began. The strategy of the *ancien régime* - the essence of which had been to look for alliances with any state prepared to support Hungary's claim for territorial revision (initially Italy, then Germany) - had manifestly failed. However, this strategy never made the distinction between all the territories lost by Hungary (the Crownlands of St Stephen) and the territories inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. In 1945, it was evident that such a policy of integral revisionism was bankrupt and that Hungary could begin to come to terms with the loss of empire.

Various new currents surfaced, three of which were noteworthy: Danubian cooperation, defence of the ethnic minority and communism. Although the last of these emerged the winner, the first two left traces on Hungarian thinking that have not disappeared entirely. None of the successor states pursued policies that were particularly sympathetic to the ethnic Hungarians, but communism froze the *status quo* and thereafter the question of the 3.5 million or so ethnic Hungarians played only an occasional role in domestic and international politics. Leninist nationalities policies did little to solve the problem of majority-minority relations, except at the level of rhetoric.

In Hungary itself, the question largely disappeared from the overt political agenda and the Kádár régime insisted, with particular emphasis, that this should remain so as far as public consumption was concerned. The most that the communist government was prepared to do was to keep a watching brief on the minorities. Only gradually did policies change. In the 1960s, Kádár's idea was that the problem of the minorities could be subsumed in a Danubian cooperation project, but this came to nothing for lack of support. In the 1970s, the Hungarians tried a bilateral approach, signing agreements with the successor states that minorities - all minorities, including those living in Hungary - would constitute bridges between Hungary and its neighbours. This strategy was moderately successful with Yugoslavia, less so with

Czechoslovakia, but led nowhere with Romania. By the 1980s, there was growing readiness on the part of the Hungarian government to try to internationalise the problem, by raising it in various forums, like the CSCE, but this had very limited support. Overall, the collapse of communism left public opinion unprepared for the question of how Hungarians in Hungary should approach the problems, difficulties and demands of the minorities in the successor states.

From the perspective of the successor states, the question looked very different. As far as *Yugoslavia* was concerned, the Hungarian minority was never much more than an irritant, partly because Yugoslav politics were dominated by the Serb-Croat question and partly because the Hungarian state was least interested in this minority. Nevertheless, when the opportunity arose in 1941, Hungary joined Germany in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and reannexed the Backa, as well as two small pockets of land in Croatia and Slovenia.

Immediately after the Second World War, the communists instituted a brief policy of revenge, which included massacres and imprisonments, and the settlement of Serbs and Montenegrins in the main Hungarian-inhabited area, Vojvodina. The Hungarian minority was thereafter largely ignored. It came to notice only when some particular issue surfaced, but such occasions were rare. The key characteristic of the minority was that it was sociologically weak, being made up largely of peasants and lacking an intellectual stratum to articulate ethnic demands and threaten Serbian hegemony until the 1970s, by which time Vojvodina was ruled by a rather hard-line régime dominated by the former Partisan settlers. The toppling of this régime by Slobodan Milosevic in 1988 was felt by the Hungarians as a liberation, and restrictions on their activities were imposed only gradually.

In *Czechoslovakia*, the problem of the Hungarian minority was similarly a peripheral one, both between the two World Wars and after 1945. During the first republic, the central concern of the Czechs was twofold - to establish a democratic state and to make this a state permeated by Czech ideals. This made it necessary to find a solution to the German problem that would enable the Czechs to dominate the state without giving the appearance of doing so. This was the function of 'Czechoslovakism', the proposition that Czechs and Slovaks constituted a single 'Czechoslovak' nation, which had a numerical preponderance in the new state. The Hungarian question was a subsidiary one. From the Czech perspective, the existence of the minority and Hungary's revisionist policies formed a useful pretext for denying the Slovaks the federation that they had been promised, because a federal system would have been a security risk. The device also to some extent encouraged Slovaks to regard the Hungarians as a serious rival, antagonist and enemy, as a result of which the Slovak national ideology became markedly anti-Hungarian. The construction of the post-1918 Slovak identity and self-image used anti-Hungarian elements as a 'safe' component. Thus the period of forced assimilation (1867-1918) was projected backwards historically and it was argued that the Hungarian state had always sought to assimilate the Slovaks, that Slovakia had suffered under the Hungarian yoke for a thousand years. The oppression of Slovak peasants by the Hungarian aristocracy was reinterpreted as an ethno-national relationship, rather than a class one in which ethnic self-identification was marginal, since Hungarian peasants were just as oppressed as Slovak ones. The reannexation of ethnically Hungarian southern Slovakia by Hungary

after Munich, as a result of the First Vienna Arbitration in 1938, merely confirmed the Slovaks' perceptions of the Hungarians as their greatest enemies.

After 1945, the situation changed radically, in consequence of the adoption of a 'Slavonic' ideology by the reconstituted state of Czechoslovakia. On this basis, the Germans were expelled and the Hungarians were subjected to severe repression, including the denial of citizenship, confiscations, some expulsions, forced labour in the Czech lands and the denial of ethnic institutions of any kind. The period 1945-1948 completely traumatised the Hungarians of Slovakia, as might have been expected, but ultimately the repression did nothing to promote the Slovaks' sense of identity and remove their sense of inferiority vis-à-vis both Prague and Budapest. In summary, the emerging Slovak élite could never forgive the Hungarians, whether the members of the minority or the Hungarian state, for having come so close to assimilating them. This was the core of the Slovak trauma and it became an organic feature of the Slovak national self-image and identity, one that was transmitted during the communist period and played a key role in underpinning Slovak fears after 1989.

The communist coup d'état of 1948 gradually put an end to the repression, but there was never any question of the Hungarians being given the same rights as Czechs and Slovaks (in so far as the word 'rights' could in any way be appropriate to a communist system). Czechoslovakism was abandoned, the Slovaks were recognised symbolically as a fully equal constitutive nation in the state, but were denied the power that the Slovaks felt that they should have by a communist centralisation that was interpreted as a Czech centralisation. In this context, the Hungarians once again served the politically useful purpose of being a target of Slovak resentment.

In 1968, the Hungarian minority sought, but was not granted, equal treatment; following the suppression of the 'Prague Spring', Slovakia was granted a good deal of autonomy under the new federal arrangement post-1969. The Slovaks used this to strengthen their own national identity, which they tended to interpret in material terms. During the following decades the population of Bratislava grew enormously, from around 200,000 to something under half a million; the rapid pace of expansion shows in the disastrous socialist dormitory suburbs that now surround the city and are held up as a negative example of urban planning. The growth of Bratislava had a symbolic function. Slovakia was now a serious political actor and, therefore, it had to have a serious capital. Much the same went for the heavy industrial base that was built in northern Slovakia - it was an exercise in quantitative expansion with symbolic overtones.

As far as the minority was concerned, the more or less autonomous Slovak leadership tried to weaken the Hungarians' cultural institutions, by seeking to close down schools, for example. This was not wholly successful, but the constant assimilatory pressure was not without consequences. The expulsions of 1945-48 had principally affected the educated élites; subsequent Slovak pressure went some way towards blocking the re-emergence of an ethnic Hungarian élite and the sociological profile of the minority showed that peasants and workers predominated to a much greater extent than among the Slovaks.

The situation was different again in *Romania*, where the proportion of Hungarians was smaller than in Slovakia, but where their absolute number (which was contested,

but certainly around 2 million by the 1970s) made the problem a qualitatively different one. There were other factors, too, which differentiated the situation in Romania from the other successor states and, to an extent, made the Hungarian problem a central one - though not the only central one - for the Romanian state. Before 1914, Romania had been an ethnically almost pure country and the state was constituted on this basis. Citizenship depended on Romanian ethnicity and, for example, Jews were automatically denied citizenship since they could never become Orthodox Christians.

The emergence of Greater Romania in 1918, therefore, was simultaneously a triumph and a trauma for the Romanians. On the one hand, they had finally achieved the great objective of Romanian foreign policy and national pride, the reunification of the three Romanian lands of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, and were successful in incorporating the maximum number of ethnic Romanians into the new state by expanding into Bessarabia and southern Bukovina.

On the other hand, for the first time Romanians were obliged to share their state with sizeable numbers of non-Romanians, of whom the Hungarians were the most numerous, but there were many others, notably Germans and various Slavonic minorities. For many Romanians, the proposition that individuals who were not ethnic Romanians and Orthodox Christians could be fully fledged members of the state and entitled to all the rights of citizenship was alien and repugnant. Two groups were regarded with special disfavour - Jews and Hungarians. We can leave the question of Romanian-Jewish relations to one side here, but the relationship with the Hungarians was historically difficult and convoluted. The two states had been neighbours for many centuries, both had suffered at the hands of the Ottomans, but the Hungarians had clearly emerged better prepared for the onset of modernity in the nineteenth century than the Romanians. Throughout much of their modern history, Romanians had perforce been obliged to regard Hungary as their window on the West; the first book printed in Romanian was published in Budapest, for example. At the same time, most Regateans - Romanians from the Danubian provinces⁽²⁾ - had come to regard Hungarian rule over Transylvania as cruel, oppressive and unjust, so that its incorporation in Romania in 1918 was celebrated as a measure of great historical justice and compensation for the humiliation of defeat and occupation by the Central Powers during the First World War. The invasion of Hungary in 1919 as a part of the anti-communist intervention campaign by the Romanian army and the occupation of Budapest for several months was felt to be just revenge, but left deep resentments in its wake among the Hungarians.

At the affective level - the level where collective emotional responses resonate - the symbolic power of Transylvania in the Romanian mind-set is extraordinarily significant. The Romanian-Hungarian relationship was further complicated, however, by the fact that Transylvania was seen by both ethnic groups as a symbol of their existence as a community. The Romanians argued that the presence of ethnic Romanians in Transylvania after the withdrawal of Roman legions had been the key factor that ensured their survival as an independent ethnic and cultural community. The Hungarians claimed with equal fervour that the semi-autonomous Transylvanian state of the seventeenth century, which signed the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 as an independent entity, represented the continuity of Hungarian statehood during the

period of Ottoman occupation. From this perspective, the union of Transylvania with Hungary in 1848 was the logical outcome of many centuries of development.

This confusion of issues of identity and emotions made it virtually impossible to disentangle issues of legal rights, property, land reform, language usage, education and so on from state sovereignty and territorial revisionism. Indeed, the relatively centralised system set up in Romania after 1918 might formally have been justified in terms of territorial security, though in reality it was as much about extending Regatean norms to Transylvania, including their extension to the Transylvanian Romanians, as anything else.

However, while Belgrade and Prague had only relatively weak minorities to deal with, the Hungarians of Transylvania were a different matter. Not only had they been the rulers of the province for centuries, and thus possessed the self-confidence of traditional legitimation, but in addition the community had markedly higher educational, cultural and economic standards than the Romanians. For the average Romanian from the Regat, a journey to Transylvania was (and to an extent still is) a cultural shock, because it looks different, feels different and an alien language is widely spoken there. It was a far more complex matter to subordinate this community to the norms of the Romanian state than the integration of the untutored peasants of Vojvodina was for the Serbs.

Against this background, the return to Hungary of two-fifths of Transylvania by the Second Vienna Arbitration of 1940 was completely traumatising for Romanian opinion, and, for what it is worth, the new frontier was far less satisfactory from the ethnic standpoint than the one between Hungary and the Slovak state drawn in the First Vienna Arbitration of 1938. The recovery of northern Transylvania became a major war-aim for Romania and it influenced the Romanian élite in their acceptance of communism, because the deal offered to them by the Kremlin in 1945 was in effect either a reintegrated but communist Romania or a semi-democratic Romania without northern Transylvania. The Romanians opted for the former.

The coming of communism was more complex than this, however, and the role that the Hungarian minority played in that process influenced their treatment during the whole of the communist period. In 1945-46, the leadership of the Hungarian minority came to the conclusion that Marxism was the most effective guarantor of their future as an ethnic community and threw its weight behind the communist takeover. It is generally agreed that the success of the communists depended on Hungarian support; non-communist Romanians have never forgotten this.

On the other hand, Hungarian calculations went awry and the communist Romanian state was not prepared to create the conditions in which a strong, self-confident minority could sustain its institutions and develop its own political norms and power. The aim of the Romanian party-state was to whittle away the power amassed by the Hungarians and it had succeeded in this by the 1970s.

Ceausescu's severely repressive policies had an impact on the entire population of the country, but the Hungarians felt that they were at a twofold disadvantage, in that they were repressed in their ethnicity, as well as their civic identity. The late Ceausescu régime (1971-89) increasingly used the Hungarians as a propagandistic target and

sought to bolster its own fading strength by relying on anti-Hungarian nationalism. The systematisation project of 1987-89, which sought to reduce the number of villages in Romania by a half, was widely viewed by Hungarians as a measure directed against them, although it had just as hard an impact on ethnic Romanians. The legacy of the Ceausescu years, which created a deeply negative stereotype of Hungarians among Romanians, became a central part of the adjustment process in the politics of post-communist Romania.

AFTER COMMUNISM: HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVES

In 1990 the newly elected Hungarian government was completely inexperienced and made a fair number of errors in handling the problem of Hungarian minorities in the successor states. It started from the assumption that the communists had shamefully neglected the national question and that Hungarian opinion was determined that historic wounds should be healed. In this context, the task of the new nationally-minded government was to act as protector of the Hungarian nation, regardless of where its members lived, both morally and politically. As a matter of fact, neither assumption was correct. The communist government had, in fact, taken an interest in the fate of the ethnic Hungarians, though it acted in a very low-key fashion, and, second, Hungarian public opinion was not primarily concerned with righting the wrongs of Trianon. That was first and foremost an intellectual issue.

An early statement by the new prime minister, József Antall, that he was the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians 'in spirit', was guaranteed to inflame suspicions that Hungary had political designs on its neighbours, that at the very least the Hungarian state would play an active role vis-à-vis the minorities and would thereby interfere in the internal affairs of the successor states.⁽³⁾ Another early statement that Hungary's defence policy would be that of all-round defence likewise did little to reassure them, despite repeated reassurances that Hungary would never seek to change its frontiers by force.

The difficulty with Hungary's policies was that sometimes the government and, to an even greater extent its nationalist supporters, failed to make a clear distinction between ethnicity and territory, thereby regularly creating the impression that it did indeed have an interest in the redrawing of the frontiers. In an already heightened atmosphere of suspicion, where nationalism was used equally actively as a political resource in the successor states, the occasional statements that Hungary had no desire to change frontiers tended to be dismissed as disingenuous or as propaganda aimed at the West. Extreme nationalist publications like *Szentkorona* and *Hunnia* were constantly making such inflammatory calls, though they were marginal to the mainstream of Hungarian politics.⁽⁴⁾ In effect, internal Hungarian debates were seized upon in the successor states as evidence of hostile Hungarian intentions.

A word on the make-up of the ruling coalition is appropriate at this point. One can largely disregard the minor partners of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) - the Smallholders and the Christian Democrats - as they were marginal. However, the MDF itself was a coalition, something that was far from unusual under post-communist conditions. Its main elements were the national liberals, the Christian Democrats and the radical-nationalist populists. Antall himself belonged to the Christian Democrat tendency and had established a complete pre-eminence over the party. The national liberals, on the other hand, were rather weak and were weakened further by the rising tide of impatience that propelled the populists into the foreground.

Their leader was the writer and demagogue, István Csurka, whose ability to play on sensitive issues had gained him a considerable following, one that he was able to mobilise to take to the streets. Csurka's ideology was a vague but thoroughgoing radicalism. He believed that Hungary had been 'robbed' of its revolution thanks to the peaceful transfer of power in 1989-90 and called for a complete redistribution of power. At the same time, he made emotional appeals in the name of the Hungarian nation and the national spirit and called for national unity as a way of overcoming the existing difficulties experienced by the country. His attitude to the question of the Hungarian minorities was more oblique than anything. He was not an explicit revisionist, demanding frontier changes, but in the atmosphere of suspicion, his allusions and the hints that he dropped could be understood as tantamount to that. One example of this was the interview that Csurka was reported as having given to the Zagreb paper *Globus* (26 February 1993), in which - according to the report - he said, 'I do not say that we do not have territorial claims and these are legitimate, vis-à-vis Baranja and Vojvodina', though he then added that because of Hungary's economic and military weakness it was unable to realise these claims.⁽⁵⁾

Furthermore, by raising the temperature on the minorities question, Csurka was hoping to effect radical changes in Hungary itself, a clear instance of using the minorities problem with another aim in mind, something that spokesmen for the minorities themselves complained of repeatedly. On the other hand, within the MDF Csurka's position was not as strong as it had been assumed. At the MDF Congress in January 1993, Csurka's support was shown to be limited and Antall was successful in repulsing the offensive that Csurka had launched the previous summer.⁽⁶⁾

It should also be understood that although Csurka may have had popular support on domestic social issues, it was minimal on the question of the minorities. Indeed, there was more than a measure of fear and resentment of those members of the minorities who resettled in Hungary and were regarded as parasites taking jobs from Hungarians. In terms of popular backing, a fairly frequently encountered estimate suggested that Csurka's support did not exceed 12-15 per cent of the vote and not all of these supporters could actually be mobilised to cast their votes.

By 1993, however, the debate within Hungary on the Hungarian minorities in the successor states had changed in quality.⁽⁷⁾ The initial basis of official Hungarian concern, democracy and human rights, was no longer felt to be adequate by nationalists in Budapest, who argued that the position of the minorities was bad and deteriorating. Consequently, there was an undercurrent of opinion that preferred a much more active policy, possibly even going as far as advocating territorial revision, albeit through peaceful means. It should be stressed that this was not official policy, but there were no forthright official denials and Hungarian policy tended to be ambiguous. Towards the end of 1992, there had been repeated rumours that, among other policy options, the government was considering extending the rights of citizenship and voting to all ethnic Hungarians, regardless of where they lived. In a statement in Munich, Géza Entz, the head of the Office for Hungarians Abroad, was reported as having said this and adding that he expected that the necessary framework would be in place by the 1994 Hungarian elections.⁽⁸⁾ Any such moves would set off stentorian alarm bells in all the successor states.

There was another aspect of this problem, one which the nationalists in the successor states preferred to ignore. The spectrum of debate in Hungary was wide - positions differed and these differences were freely articulated in the press. However, outside Hungary nationalists ignored the fact that opinions expressed in a debate should be understood in that context and their tendency to attribute a homogeneity to Hungarian opinion was certainly misleading and distorted. Thus when official spokesmen said, as they regularly did, that Hungary had no territorial demands on any of its neighbours - the foreign minister, Géza Jeszenszky did this, for example, with respect to Romania in an interview with *Romania Libera* (22 February 1993) - this would be discounted as disingenuous and deceptive tactics on the part of the Hungarians. In many respects, the Hungarians' counterargument - that the atmosphere was so strained that, regardless of what they said, there would always be somebody in the successor states ready to find some devious conspiracy in their public utterances - deserved attention.

It should also be understood that in many respects one of the countries that would suffer directly from any territorial changes would be Hungary itself. While out-and-out nationalists might dream of returning to the pre-Trianon frontiers, or at least to the Second World War frontiers, analysis not based solely on ethnicity would show that Hungary would experience extreme difficulties in reintegrating any territories putatively ceded by any of the successor states. A worst-case scenario for Hungary would be the hypothetical case where Romania agreed to return Transylvania. The problems of economic, political and social integration would be insurmountable and if this hypothetically enlarged Hungary wished to keep its democratic institutions, it would have to become a joint Hungarian and Romanian state, something that few people would relish. Indeed, it has been suggested by Budapest wits that if Hungary's neighbours wanted to ruin Hungary for good, they should simply return all the Hungarian-inhabited areas to Budapest's jurisdiction. The result would be a disaster and many people in Hungary have understood this explicitly or implicitly.

A further aspect of Hungary's policies was the way in which the small minorities in the country were dealt with. Under the communists, there was some element of using the minorities, by claiming that they were very well treated, in order to show up the successor states. It was hard for the post-communist state to avoid a similar approach, but the formulation of a new draft law on the minorities, which was agreed in March 1993, was in part genuinely based on the principles of human and collective rights.⁽⁹⁾

It took some time for the Hungarian government to formulate a defence doctrine and a defence policy based on it. This was put before parliament in March 1993; it firmly stated that the Hungarian republic had no predetermined enemies and that it looked to pan-European and regional cooperation as the most favoured framework within which problems would be solved. These would include the sensitive issues of ethnic minorities as well, which 'cannot be regarded as falling within the exclusive sphere of internal politics of the state involved' and should therefore 'be resolved through active international cooperation'.⁽¹⁰⁾ Furthermore, Hungary rejected all thought of changes in the country's frontiers by force. The entire political spectrum in parliament supported this new defence concept.

The country's difficulties did not end there, however. Hungary made it very evident that it wished to be integrated into NATO or at any rate receive some kind of Western

security guarantee. The West, for its part, repeatedly made it equally clear that it had no intention of doing anything of the kind. This left Hungary with no alternative but to embark on a defence policy of its own, involving a modernisation and professionalisation of the armed forces and the frontier guard. Had Hungary existed in a vacuum, this might have had no repercussions, but in the overheated atmosphere of post-communism, those in the successor states who were in any case sceptical now grew more suspicious and were able to use Hungarian moves as a pretext for an armament programme of their own. There were certainly those in Hungary who wanted to construct a much stronger, much more nationalistically defined strategy, but for the time being the moderates held the line. Even so, some of the Hungarian opposition could be ranked among the sceptics and they were concerned that the government could use the armed forces for domestic purposes, although there was no tradition of a politicised military in Hungary.

The aim of the new defence doctrine was to establish an armed force of around 100,000 men equipped with modern weapons and an air defence system; many offensive weapons had already been scrapped under the CFE agreements and the process continued into 1992. Some units would be deployed as an airmobile rapid reaction force, an aim presumably inspired by the war of Yugoslav succession, which alarmed the Hungarians because the country's southern frontier appeared completely open to incursions. The bombing of Barcs, a small town on the border, by the Yugoslav air force in October 1991, and especially the admission by the pilot that this had been a deliberate act on his part (though he was not necessarily carrying out higher orders) exposed the weakness of the Hungarians for all to see. The problem was that the Soviet air defence system had been removed with the withdrawal of the Red Army in June 1991 and was not replaced until well into 1992.

The policy of rearming that the Hungarian government launched in 1992 was certainly regarded as alarming in the successor states. However, given Hungary's military weakness in the face of a deteriorating security situation (the war of Yugoslav succession, the division of Czechoslovakia and instability in Romania) and the lack of any evidence of Western readiness to give Hungary military support should this become necessary, Budapest argued that there was no alternative to rearming.

HUNGARY AND SERBIA

The most serious situation was to the south, where the war in Croatia in 1991 and the disintegration of Yugoslavia brought Hungary a host of new problems, notably the presence of an unofficially estimated 100,000 refugees. While the Hungarian government was unequivocally more friendly towards Croatia (and Slovenia) than towards Serbia, the bulk of the Hungarian minority lived in the last of the post-Yugoslav states. Serbian policy towards its Hungarian minority was one of impatience, but repression was sporadic and in early 1993 many of the institutions established by the minority still remained in being.

Budapest was deeply concerned at the potential spill-over from the fighting. The waywardness and unpredictability of Serbia after 1991, the readiness of Serbian élites to use violence to gain territory and the rise of an extremist Serbian messianism were highly alarming for the Hungarians. This was made all the more acute by the relative inactivity of the West, not just in its refusal to intervene but by its general confusion about what to do in situations where one ethno-national group was using force to change both frontiers and the existing ethnic order by 'ethnic cleansing'. In addition, there was a barely articulated concern that Western passivity in the face of Serbian aggression was sending a message to nationalists everywhere. The fear that ethnic cleansing could be applied against the Hungarian minorities was a real one and Hungarians felt helpless to do anything about it other than through diplomacy.

Indeed, the success of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina undoubtedly created a precedent that was not lost on the Serbs with respect to Vojvodina. From the perspective of extreme nationalists, the Hungarian-inhabited areas represented a useful space where refugees from the south could be settled. Should ethnic cleansing begin in earnest in Vojvodina, it was hard to see how any Hungarian government could stand aside, not least because Hungarian inactivity would be a precedent that would certainly be exploited in Slovakia and Romania. The result would certainly be hostilities, with the possibility of direct Serbian intervention in Hungary. The outcome of such a conflict was unclear. Belgrade gossip took the view that the battle-hardened Serbian army could be in Budapest in two days; Hungarian military planners, on the other hand, felt that the Serbian army was in such disarray that the Hungarians would have no trouble in throwing them back.

The Central European rumour mill was clearly busy on this question, indicating a good deal of unease in Hungary about Serbian intentions. Notably, it was suggested that in the event of a NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia, Serbian missiles would be fired at Hungary (Budapest was claimed to be within range).⁽¹¹⁾ In mid-February 1993, the Hungarian government felt forced to deny all knowledge of this scenario, but the implication was clear enough. Many in Hungary were quietly concerned as to whether or not the West would intervene should there be a Serbian attack on Hungarian territory. The precedent of Kuwait suggested that perhaps it might and the existence of sizeable Western investment in Hungary would also be a factor pushing in this direction. On the other hand, the West's inactivity in the war of Yugoslav succession implied that the West would not intervene actively in Hungary either.

The reality of the situation in Vojvodina was very contradictory. The Hungarian minority had actually benefited from the collapse of the hardline regime in 1988, because for the first time since the end of the Second World War, it was able to begin constructing its own institutions. Associations were set up, the press was free of restrictions, the blank spots in history, like the post-1945 massacres of Hungarians by Serbian partisans, could be filled in and, through the Democratic Alliance of the Hungarians in Vojvodina (VMDK), the minority gained representation in the Serbian parliament. On the other hand, the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear was gaining rather than slackening as the overall situation in Serbia deteriorated. The Serbian paramilitaries, notably those owing allegiance to Vojislav Seselj, repeatedly threatened the Hungarian minority with retaliation for alleged disloyalty; in reality, their very presence in Serbia was offensive in the eyes of extremists.

As in other post-communist countries, the ethnicisation of the state bore hard on the minority, in that virtually all legal, administrative and political instruments were in the hands of the majority, minority duties were strictly defined and exacted, but their rights were ignored and remedies were delayed. Military service by ethnic Hungarians in the Yugoslav armed forces, later the Serbian army, was a case in point. Hungarians felt that the war in Croatia was absolutely no concern of theirs and they were reluctant to be involved - a political and cultural position. The Serbian authorities, on the other hand, interpreted the situation solely from a legal perspective and insisted that, as citizens of Serbia, the ethnic Hungarians had the same obligations as everyone else. Hungarians complained that disproportionate numbers of them were called up (this could not be verified) and many of them deserted, most then going to Hungary. Some Serbs deserted as well.

Something in the order of 50,000 ethnic Hungarians had by 1993 fled from the former Yugoslavia to Hungary, but a considerable proportion of these came from the areas of Croatia occupied by Serbian paramilitaries in eastern Slavonia and Baranja. Around half were thought to be from Vojvodina, many of them of military age and escaping Serbian conscription. The resettlement in Vojvodina of Serbian refugees from Bosnia and Croatia exacerbated a tense situation, as many of them were looking for somewhere to live and regarded the houses of the minorities as a useful solution. The authorities either stood by or actively encouraged these illegal seizures of property. It should be noted here, however, that the smaller minorities in Vojvodina - Croats, Slovaks, Ruthenians - suffered far more than the Hungarians. Indeed, the Slovak minority was thought to have been effectively liquidated through emigration.⁽¹²⁾

The report by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the rapporteur for the UN fact-finding mission, confirmed that the situation was very tense and the level of insecurity was high, but Mazowiecki, the respected former Polish prime minister, added that there had been no ethnic cleansing on the Bosnian model.⁽¹³⁾ There were other pinpricks, like the Serbian law that only Serbian-language place names be used on the territory of the state, thereby theoretically obliging Hungarian-speakers to pepper their conversation with Serbian terminology. And Hungarian-language schooling was reportedly under threat by the new law on education.

At the same time, the Hungarians' organisation VMDK was able to strengthen its position in the Vojvodina parliament, as well as in the Serbian and Yugoslav assemblies, gathering up to 85 per cent of the vote of the minority. This gave it a clear

legitimacy to speak in the name of the Hungarian community in Serbia and its strategy was to demand territorial autonomy, presumably along the lines that the Serbs were demanding for the Krajina area of Croatia.

What saved the situation was that Serbia was far more closely involved with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. As long as these two territorial objectives held Serbia's attention, the Hungarians could be reasonably certain that hostile measures against them would be sporadic rather than systematic. In this ambiguous situation, the presence of CSCE monitors was a small step in the right direction, but Western leverage over Serbia was minimal.

HUNGARY AND SLOVAKIA

With respect to Slovakia, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that until the very end of 1992 the Hungarian government completely failed to take the Slovaks seriously as a political factor and relied on its good relationship with the Czechoslovak government as its chief instrument of policy. The fiasco over the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Barrage (GNB) shows this most clearly. Some background to this increasingly complex issue would be useful at this point. In 1977, the Hungarian and Czechoslovak governments signed a treaty to harness the Danube as a source of hydroelectric power by building a system of barrages between Bratislava and the Danube Bend. The Danube flows through Slovak (formerly Czechoslovak) territory for a few kilometres around Bratislava, after which it constitutes the international boundary between the two states until it enters Hungary.

In Hungary, the building of the GNB increasingly became a source of concern on the grounds of its effect on the environment, and cost; successive Hungarian governments prevaricated over what to do, finally deciding to abrogate the 1977 treaty unilaterally. The Slovaks, on the other hand, grew more and more interested in the GNB project and it gradually became a symbol of national pride. They were prepared to ignore the environmental arguments, though some Hungarians suspected that the real reason behind this was that it would primarily be the Hungarian-inhabited areas of Slovakia, the Zitny Ostrov (Csallóköz), that would suffer. This was hard to prove, but what is clear beyond any doubt is that the Hungarian government did not understand that solid Slovak interests were behind the GNB. These interests were bureaucratic, like the water lobby, which favoured the project because it would be able to expand its budgets, patronage and bureaucratic control; and material, like the construction lobby, which saw the scheme as an excellent opportunity to make money and extend its power. These interests were not to be deflected by environmental arguments and the Czechoslovak federal government lacked the leverage to prevent the Slovaks going ahead with the project, particularly after 1989, when the disposition of forces in the Czechoslovak parliament favoured the blocking minorities that the Slovaks were always able to put together. Crucially, the Hungarians failed to see that once construction had begun, the project would be irreversible.

The GNB scheme was therefore destined to be a major burden on Slovak-Hungarian relations from the moment of Slovak independence. It involved both legal and political issues, as well as economic ones and the two sides tended to switch to whichever line of argument suited their position best. This was the situation in the early part of 1993, by which time the West was becoming involved. There was growing recognition within the EC that poor Slovak-Hungarian relations would be a source of continuing instability in Central Europe and, under the impact of the war of Yugoslav succession, the West began to show a degree of concern that the GNB dispute should be settled through a compromise. There was pressure on both sides to achieve this.⁽¹⁴⁾

The question of the minority in Slovakia, while not directly linked to the GNB, became interwoven in it, as the Slovak government relied increasingly on the rhetoric of nationalism to bolster its position. Vladimir Meciar, the Slovak prime minister, categorically rejected any thought of collective rights for the minority, regarding

cultural and/or territorial autonomy as the first step towards separatism. He repeatedly insisted that the deputies elected by the minority were not representative of minority opinion⁽¹⁵⁾ and refused to meet them. The members of the Hungarian minority were also uneasy that a number of symbolic steps had been taken which appeared to downgrade their status in the new state, notably in the refusal of the Meciár government to appoint an ethnic Hungarian as a deputy chairman of the Slovak parliament, something that had become a regular practice in the postwar period.

The language law, which gave the minority the right to use Hungarian in settlements where they constituted over 20 per cent of the population, was also thought to be in danger. Small events, like the decision of the Slovak government to remove bilingual road signs in the heavily Hungarian-inhabited districts of the Zitny Ostrov, were regarded as harbingers of much worse things to come. The situation was exacerbated by the disingenuous explanations offered by Slovak officialdom, namely that bilingual road signs would confuse tourists, a point made by the first Slovak foreign minister, Milan Knazko, among others. Equally, Slovaks argued that the fate of the Hungarian minority was linked with the treatment of the Slovak minority in Hungary and then pointed to the drop in the size of the latter. Quite apart from the intellectually dubious nature of this linkage - the stability of Slovakia depended essentially on the internal relationship between the majority and the minority and not on an external condition - the degree of integration of Slovaks in Hungary was historically much more thoroughgoing than that of Hungarians in Slovakia. At the same time, and this irked the Hungarians as well, Slovak spokesmen insisted that the Hungarian minority was well treated and that the democratic state of Slovakia was doing everything to give the minority all the cultural rights that were appropriate.

The attitude of the minority itself was also relevant, because its values and actions influenced the Slovaks; above all it could be used as a pretext for Slovak extremists to call for anti-Hungarian measures. In essence, the attitude of the Hungarian minority was that it had wanted to preserve the Czechoslovak framework, because it regarded Prague as a counterweight to the Slovaks. This made the Hungarian minority very suspect in the eyes of Slovak nationalists, although it was doing no more than formulating its own interests. With the end of Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian minority was very apprehensive about its future as a community in the new state, and made no bones about saying so. The leader of Coexistence, Miklós Duray, was in any event a deeply detested figure among Slovak nationalists because of his clear-cut defence of the minority during the communist as well as the post-communist period. On the other hand, it should be clearly understood that there was no wish among the Hungarians of Slovakia to rejoin Hungary. They had lived in the same state as the Slovaks since 1918 - the 1938-1945 interlude only confirmed these attitudes - and had no wish to change. In a word, their commitment to the Slovak state was evident, but in exchange they wanted that state to recognise their political right to maintain a Hungarian culture. This was the nub of the difficulty for Slovak nationalists. The proposition that Slovakia was a state of both Slovaks and Hungarians was completely unacceptable to them.

Other aspects of Slovak politics were a further source of anxiety to the Hungarian minority. They revealed a high degree of intolerance of dissent on the part of the Meciár government, which augured badly for the mind-set needed to reach a compromise on the ethnic question. Thus the decision within days of independence to

clamp down on the media, and the fate of the new university at Trnava, though not linked in any way to the minority problem, were regarded as ominous signs in that they affected the political atmosphere.

The Meciar government, especially Meciar himself, insisted that the media paint a 'truthful' picture of the country and took criticism very badly. It took control of the electronic media and also moved against some printed journals.⁽¹⁶⁾ The story of Trnava university was highly complex, but the political essence of the crisis was that the Meciar government saw the new university as a centre of opposition, as a place where the supporters of liberalism had found a hiding place and was, therefore, determined to prevent this, using legally dubious instruments where necessary.⁽¹⁷⁾ In a broad sense, these concerns were certainly justified. The only stable, long-term prospect for the minority lay in the evolution of a Slovak civil society that was prepared to accept the pre-eminence of civic over ethnic values. A press free of state interference and the freedom of the academic sector were essential in this context.

The economic prospects for the new Slovak state were widely regarded as poor and the temptation for an economically embattled Meciar government to use the minority as a means of deflecting popular dissatisfaction was evidently strong. In addition, there were doubts about the cohesiveness of the ruling Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and fear that, if it disintegrated, Meciar would use the Hungarian minority as a scapegoat for the ills of Slovakia and as a rallying call.

On the other hand, it is worth emphasising that although many aspects of the social climate, and indeed some aspects of the political and economic structure, were unfavourable, the Hungarian-Slovak relationship was not hopeless. In particular, mediation between the two sides had distinct chances of easing the situation. This presumably helped to explain the remarkably high number of European organisations that were looking closely at the situation.

Thus, because Slovakia was fortuitously renegotiating its association agreement with the EC - the one signed with Czechoslovakia having lapsed - Brussels was insisting on the insertion of a clause protecting the rights of minorities. The Slovak government objected strongly to the insertion such provisions, and to stipulations on the environment and the arms trade. It argued that special minority provisions would be superfluous, because minority rights were already protected in the Slovak constitution. This argument was completely unacceptable to the Hungarian minority; nor did it go down too well with the EC.

Indeed, the Slovak government revealed its general distaste for Western supervision, in any form, over its negotiations with the Council of Europe for admission as a separate member. During a visit to Strasbourg, the leader of the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, Pál Csáky, submitted a number of documents outlining the Hungarian perspective on the situation. He was severely censured for this by the morals and ethics committee of the Slovak parliament, on the grounds that Csáky had given a 'one-sided view' of the situation. In effect, the Slovak side was saying that there could be only one view, the Slovak one, a position that came very close to that of democratic centralism.

The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumière, made it absolutely clear that resolution of the minority question was a precondition for Slovakia's admission to the Council. In addition, interest was also shown by the newly appointed CSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, who visited both Bratislava and Budapest in February 1993. Western interest in the issue was evidently prompted by fears of the possible consequences of the Yugoslav situation, as well as a recognition that early intervention in the case of Slovakia would be far more effective than waiting for the problem to deteriorate.

There was one further point in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship which, while generic to post-communism, seemed particularly acute, though it was not viewed in those terms by either party. This was the sheer inexperience of the Slovaks, which led them to make mistakes in the handling of their foreign policy. Furthermore, the relative ease with which power was transferred in Hungary meant that a cadre of experienced officials could be retained, whereas Slovakia had a twofold burden to live with in this respect: former communist officials were suspect and many of the Slovak foreign policy specialists opted to stay in Prague rather than transfer to the new government in Bratislava.

The Hungarian foreign ministry, on the other hand, had had well over two years to learn how to conduct a non-communist foreign policy, one that was not structured by the Warsaw Pact and Soviet interests, whereas the Slovaks had barely started. The well-publicised disagreements between Meciar and his first foreign minister Knazko illustrated this most vividly. In effect, Meciar wanted to conduct his own foreign policy, but Knazko refused to accede to this during the early months of the Meciar government. This made Slovakia an unreliable and unpredictable negotiating partner, something that all the others concerned found disconcerting, if not actually irritating.

HUNGARY AND ROMANIA

The relationship between Hungary and Romania, though less tense in 1993 than before, was a troubled one. Hungarian opinion had welcomed the fall of Ceausescu and expected a marked improvement in relations and in the treatment of the Hungarian minority. These hopes were, however, dashed with the attack on Hungarians in Tirgu Mures in March 1990. Since then, there has been an uneasy dialogue between the two governments, frequently punctuated by official and press polemics. On the other hand, in both countries the military establishments have been careful to offer assurances that disputes would not be resolved by force.

In particular, both the Hungarian minority and opinion in Hungary itself were greatly perturbed by the avowedly anti-Hungarian attitudes and activities of the extreme nationalists in Vatra Romaneasca and the Greater Romania Party. The election of Gheorghe Funar as mayor of Cluj, where 25-30 per cent of the population is Hungarian, and his announcement that public notices in Hungarian would no longer be tolerated was indicative of this state of affairs. However, it should be noted that the situation varied greatly from town to town in Transylvania, and in Timisoara, for instance, inter-ethnic relations were reasonably good. In the predominantly Hungarian-inhabited Szekler counties, the situation was to some extent reversed, in that Romanians felt that they were in a minority and that their culture was neglected.

Until the 1992 elections, the Hungarian minority was in a most uncomfortable position, in that it was the largest opposition party in parliament, something that it did not want; nor did it want the tasks attaching to it, which it could not discharge. However, as one of the components of the Democratic Convention, the main opposition grouping to the National Salvation Front, the Hungarians were returned to parliament in 1992, but were now only one element in the opposition, which eased their exposed position somewhat.

The elections demonstrated both the light and shade in the Romanian situation. The fact that the Democratic Convention was able to gather a fifth of the votes indicated that the beginnings of a civil society in Romania, one that would be prepared to talk to the Hungarians, was discernible. Indeed, the Hungarians' organisation, the Hungarian Democratic Federation of Romania (HDFR), campaigned in an election coalition with the Convention. On the other hand, the elections also returned the Greater Romania Party (3.85%) and Gheorghe Funar's Party of Romanian National Unity (7.7%), as well as the Socialist Labour Party (3%), the last being a chauvino-communist grouping. All three were strongly nationalist and anti-Hungarian; together, they came to constitute a nationalist bloc in the parliament and Iliescu's Democratic National Salvation Front tended to rely on this bloc for support.⁽¹⁸⁾

Romanian attitudes towards the minority varied considerably from province to province. By and large, it was not a salient issue in the Regat, although any potential threat to the country's territorial integrity would be treated seriously. But in Transylvania, where the proportion of Romanians to Hungarians was 7:2, the question was paramount. Large sections of the Romanian population were genuinely convinced that the minority was a disaffected element working to dismember the province. The votes for the extreme nationalist parties reflected this.

Underlying this fear were a number of theoretical factors. The history of Romanian national ideology was evidently one of these and the drive for the reunification, as the Romanians put it, of three Romanian lands was a very powerful motive in the nation's modern history. The establishment of Greater Romania in 1918 was more than just the acquisition of territory, it was also a deeply felt symbolic act. Consequently, the loss of northern Transylvania in 1940 was felt as a devastating blow. This helped to explain the high-profile significance given to the territorial issue by all Romanian nationalists, moderates and extremists alike. The historical experience of the creation of Greater Romania and its traumatising effect have already been mentioned; also relevant in this connection is the weakness, in Romanian perceptions, of the distinction between citizenship and nationhood. For many Romanians, the thought that some citizens of Romania may not be ethnic Romanians is strange or even scandalous, an anomaly that must be corrected.

Indeed, the sanctity of Romanian territory has acquired a near-obsessive quality and the merest suggestion that something might be amiss in this domain is enough to send many Romanians into a frenzy. This has important implications for the way in which the minority is perceived. Virtually regardless of the content of minority demands, the Romanian response is inclined to be negative and there is a tendency to suspect the worst of the Hungarians.

This attitude was greatly exacerbated by the propaganda of the late Ceausescu period, which tended to use the minority as a scapegoat for any of the country's problems and as a way of drumming up support. The underlying argument was that as outsiders, the ethnic Hungarians could never be loyal to the Romanian nation-state and would look for the first opportunity to dismember it again.

Propaganda of this kind found fertile soil among the largely first generation ethnic Romanian working class that moved into Transylvanian towns from the 1960s onwards. Their integration into urban life encountered the immediate obstacle that the towns were for historical reasons largely Hungarian, with the result that urbanisation came to be regarded as a kind of nationalist obstacle course, the aim of which was to defeat the Hungarians by excluding them from towns. The competition for jobs, status and power came to be based on ethnic considerations. As a result, much of the newly urbanised Romanian population and the newly elevated intelligentsia in Transylvania has become highly sensitive to expressions of Hungarian culture, which were felt to be deeply threatening: their newly acquired urban Romanian identity had been built on the basis of Romanian homogeneity. This is the section of the electorate to which the ultra-nationalist parties address their appeal. Furthermore, because this appeal resonates in the affective dimension of the Romanian consciousness, moderate Romanians find it difficult to adopt a more conciliatory position towards the minority for fear of being outflanked and considered traitors. This last proposition makes the achievements of the Democratic Convention all the more remarkable.

To the above should be added the general lacunae of post-communist politics - the weakness of institutions, the lack of trust, the atomisation of society, the propensity to ideologise all interactions and the high level of suspicion in the competition for power. Consequently, for a section of the Romanian élite all Hungarians are by definition dubious elements imbued with the aim of undermining the Romanian state and defiling its otherwise innate purity. The anthropological perspective is clearly

helpful in this context, in as much as the ethnic cleavage between the two groups has acquired very strong affective overtones and has made the crossing of these symbolic boundaries extremely difficult if not actually impossible. In simple terms, effective communication between the two communities is fraught with possible misunderstandings at a deep level, which both sides tend to perceive as having been generated by ill-will. The demands of ethnic purity eliminate the potential for dialogue, as the positions adopted now exclude this.

For their part, the Hungarians were not interested in redrawing frontiers and were content to live in Romania, but not on the terms they were being offered by the Romanian majority. When looked at from the perspective of the minority, the terms of coexistence were rather poor - second class citizenship, being the permanent target of Romanian suspicion and resentment, being expected to shoulder the duties of citizenship but without any of the countervailing rights and, ultimately, being denied the right to continuing as a collectivity. While the Romanian state and its spokesmen repeatedly denied that assimilation was the aim of Romanian policy towards the minority, the terms of coexistence could, in fact, be interpreted in this way.

The Romanian constitution was expressly unitary, drawing on a Jacobin tradition, the Hungarians having been relegated to a rather narrowly defined minority status. Added to this, it was often difficult to validate the rights that Hungarians thought they did have. The failure of the Bucharest government to intervene in Cluj after Funar had banned the public display of Hungarian language material was a case in point. Another was the prevarication of the Romanian authorities over the setting up of a separate Hungarian language university, which was regarded as tantamount to a rejection of this request, although on demographic grounds the approximately two million Hungarians could easily support such a tertiary level educational institution. The dismissal of the ethnic Hungarian prefects in the overwhelmingly Hungarian-populated Szeklerland - the counties of Covasna and Harghita - and their replacement in July 1992 by ethnic Romanians was immediately interpreted by Hungarians as a direct assault on their rights. The atmosphere of tension and suspicion generated a corresponding attitude on the part of the minority. The 700,000 or so Hungarians of the Szeklerland were in any case in a different position to the Hungarians of other areas, in that their contacts with the Romanian majority were far weaker, often to the extent of barely knowing Romanian. The ground for polarisation was consequently more fertile.

It should also be understood that the minority was not a compact, homogeneous bloc in political terms, but was divided into a variety of currents. The variety was not determined solely by attitudes to the majority, but mainly by general philosophical convictions. This variety had been recognised and the HDFR formally accepted that different platforms could exist within it. At the same time, a continuous state of tension had left its mark on the minority and there was distinct evidence of polarisation and radicalisation among some of its members. At the Congress of the HDFR in January 1993 demands for territorial autonomy were made but not endorsed, indicating that the leadership remained in the hands of moderates anxious to avoid all-out confrontation with the Romanians. All the same, the very word autonomy was like a red rag to a bull and fed the obsessions of the Romanian extremists who would not or could not see the distinction between territorial autonomy and cultural

autonomy.⁽¹⁹⁾ Indeed, on 23 February 1993 President Iliescu stated quite explicitly that ethnic autonomy on a territorial basis was unconstitutional.

In broad terms, regardless of the more hardline statements made by some Hungarians, notably Bishop László Tökés, who spoke of 'ethnic cleansing' being carried out in Romania, the position of the minority had undoubtedly improved since the fall of Ceausescu. They were now able to establish their own institutions, like newspapers and associations; in the HDFR they had an organisation to protect their interests; and they could increase their economic power through opportunities provided by the economic reform.

Finally, in their attitudes to the Hungarian state the Hungarians of Romania were less than positive. They tended to distrust Hungary and sometimes actively to dislike it. Many of them felt strangers there, indeed foreigners, and resented what they regarded as ignorant and clumsy intervention by Hungarian politicians in their affairs. Above all, they roundly condemned those like Csurka who as far as they were concerned were trying to use the problem of the Hungarian minorities outside Hungary for their own ends in order to resolve questions that had nothing to do with those minorities, like the distribution of power in Hungary. Overall, the attitude of the minority towards the Romanian state was contradictory. The Hungarian minority accepted it and were fully prepared to live with it; they regarded Romania as their homeland. On the other hand, they wanted a Romania that did not as yet exist, one that was tolerant of their demands and made the distinction between citizenship and nationhood. The problem for the minority was that it was neither appropriate nor possible for the Hungarians to bring such a Romanian civil society into being; that was something that the Romanians themselves would have to do.

As far as the Hungarian state itself was concerned, officialdom in particular was very cautious towards Romania. The initial mistakes of 1990 - the constant harping on the minority question by the government - were fewer, though they had not disappeared entirely. The foreign policy establishment did what it could to find a *modus vivendi* with Romania, though not with any signal success. The bilateral treaty between the two states had not been signed by the spring of 1993, although it was about three-quarters completed; the obstacles involved in the remaining quarter turned on issues of minority protection and the inviolability of frontiers. Likewise, the Hungarian ministry of defence was very anxious to avoid confrontation with Romania, a concern that was reciprocated by its Romanian counterpart. On the whole, despite press polemics - there was special concern in the Romanian press about Hungary's military doctrine and rearmament programme - both sides understood that it was not in their interest to allow any escalation of tension.

The West was not as deeply involved in the Hungarian-Romanian relationship as it was with the Hungarian-Slovak relationship. Nevertheless, the general principles deduced from the Yugoslav crisis - that minority problems could not be allowed to fester and that the West could and should take steps to preempt any deterioration - were applied to Romania as well. In their negotiations with the EC, the Romanians found themselves pressed to include a clause on the protection of minority rights, and admission to the Council of Europe was made conditional on a satisfactory solution to the issue. However, the West's leverage in Romania was smaller than in Slovakia and the Romanians were unquestionably more sensitive to the issue. The fact that a

sizeable section of the élite was actively hostile to Europe made it easier to reject such demands and, conversely, harder for those who wanted a settlement of the minority problem.

CONCLUSION

There is a marked instability in the central Danubian area because of the unsettled relationship between Hungary and its neighbours, between the successor states and the Hungarian minorities and between those minorities and Hungary. This instability is structural and will undoubtedly persist until genuine democracy takes root in all the countries concerned and a civil society, ready to engage in dialogue with the minority, has been established throughout the area. In the interim, given the existence of politically unsophisticated populations, many of them ready to accept simple, demagogic solutions, together with politicians ready to exploit nationalism, tension will continue.

The West's passivity over Yugoslavia evidently encouraged nationalists and authoritarians elsewhere in their belief that enforced solutions would be condoned. In particular, the West's weakness in accepting ethnic cleansing served as a precedent that others were studying with care. In this respect, a firmer line from the West and reiterated insistence that it would not recognise authoritarian solutions would unquestionably help to stiffen the resolve of democrats in the area and to delegitimize authoritarianism.

The steps taken by various Western organisations to involve themselves in the relationship between Hungary and Slovakia were undoubtedly initiatives in the right direction. Even if they failed to achieve all their stated objectives, they would demonstrate to all the parties concerned that the minorities question was being viewed in a new light in Europe, that a majority could not oppress a minority without this being noticed and that ethnic issues were nowadays recognised as having an international dimension. The problem was that solutions which might apply in the case of Hungary and Slovakia (and even that was not guaranteed) could not in any way be automatically transposed to other relationships. The principles might be identical, but the way in which they were applied would differ.

The West also had a role vis-à-vis Hungary itself, both in offering reassurances and in promoting the level of security in the region and, at the same time, in making it quite clear to the Hungarian government that the distinction between citizenship and ethnicity was a real one which must be observed when policies towards Hungarian minorities in the successor states were formulated. It would be too much to expect that Hungary would abandon its role concerning ethnic Hungarians entirely - after all, Ireland plays such a role regarding Ulster and Austria vis-à-vis the South Tyrol - but the issue is far more sensitive. On the whole, the impression created was that official Hungarian policy was more cautious than that expressed by the political extremes, but Western influence could be used to moderate these extremes.

All the actors in this situation had a role to play and their interactions could, and often did, complicate an already complex and politically charged scene. In particular, the vexed question of autonomy and its different definitions had considerable potential to poison relations. Autonomy can be defined as existing at three levels - individual, cultural and territorial - and the distribution of political power varies, depending on which level is stressed. The majorities in the successor states tended to argue that individual autonomy, the rights of citizenship, were generally sufficient for minorities and that the state would act as the guarantor of these rights, but minorities responded

that individual rights did nothing for the collective continuity of communities, above all because they perceived the state as having been ethnicised in favour of the majority. The lives of minority communities *as* communities could only be secured by legal and political instruments that the majority had come to accept as the norm.

Both territorial and cultural autonomy raise serious problems in the eyes of the majorities in the successor states, because they see the very word autonomy as the first step towards secession. There are historical precedents that can be cited to justify this approach, but the true explanation certainly lies elsewhere, in the deep anxieties of post-communist societies concerning the nature of power and the weakness of institutions within which that power might be exercised. The result is often enough a reluctance to treat problems with even a minimum of goodwill and an approach in which the worst is assumed from the outset.

In fact, territorial autonomy is probably a concept that is increasingly outdated. In modern states, with high levels of social mobility, ring-fencing a particular territory for the security of the ethnic group that lives there is likely to be counterproductive because it diminishes the choices and opportunities open to members of the minority; it creates minorities within minorities; it leaves without protection those members of the minority who live outside the main area of settlement; and it intensifies majority suspicions. On the other hand, one can understand the fears of a minority that has long felt under pressure and feels that its rights in an ethnicised state will only be protected by this kind of territorial arrangement.

The ultimate solution lies in the development of citizenship in contradistinction to ethnicity. Currently, under post-communism, there is very strong propensity to regard all rights and duties within the state as deriving from the ethnic dimension of nationhood and to ignore or play down the rights bestowed by citizenship. This inevitably discriminates against those who are not members of the majority and will tend to promote friction, it will diminish the value of citizenship in the eyes of the minority and could lead to disaffection, with far-reaching consequences. But the shift from ethnicity to citizenship will not be an easy one, because the fears of the majority will first have to be dispelled and minority demands, however reasonable they may look from outside, produce the contrary result.

Various devices, such as repeated assurances from the Hungarian minorities, but also from Hungary itself, and above all from the West, on the inviolability of the territorial integrity of all the states concerned, is essential in promoting a favourable atmosphere. In this connection, the events in the former Yugoslavia, with the threat of enforced frontier changes and ethnic cleansing, are a source of fear for all the parties, both majorities and minorities, precisely because they are an example of an existing order under threat. What can be imposed on the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who did after all constitute the largest single ethno-national community in that republic, could also become the fate of any other nation - or so it is feared. The role of the West in providing reassurances in this respect is crucial, but an acceptable solution to the Bosnian crisis would be even better.

Ultimately, only a stable democratic order in all the Danubian states will successfully guarantee long-term stability.

ANNEXE

CONFLICTING ESTIMATES OF MINORITY POPULATIONS⁽²⁰⁾

	1*	2	3
Hungary			
Germans	35,000	175,000	220,000
Slovaks	30,000	120,000	150,000
South Slavs	40,000	60,000	80,000
Romanians	10,000	20,000	25,000
Romania**			
Hungarians	1,620,000	2,000,000	2,500,000
Slovakia			
Hungarians	560,000	650,000	750,000
Serbia			
Hungarians	300,000	350,000	

* 1 = official or semi-official figures, of variable credibility

2 = highest credible figures

3 = highest available figures, generally not credible.

** Note that the ethnic division of Transylvania is 72.3% Romanian, 23.9% Hungarian and 3.7% other (source *Adevarul*, 30-31 May 1992).

1. At the time, these were Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the later Yugoslavia (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until 1929). A tiny strip of land was also ceded to Poland. Between 1938 and 1945, Hungary regained territories and as a result most ethnic Hungarians were reincorporated in the Hungarian state, together with some non-Hungarians, but with Hungary emerging from the Second World War as 'Hitler's last satellite', none of these gains could be kept. The Trianon frontiers were returned to, except for the so-called Bratislava bridgehead, three villages on the southern bank of the Danube, which had to be ceded by Hungary to Czechoslovakia in 1947. Following the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Hungary's neighbours are Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. Ethnic Hungarians live in all these states, but these communities are insignificant in Austria, Croatia and Slovenia. There is no particular problem with the Hungarian community of about 200,000 in Ukraine.

2. The 'Regat' is the term used to refer to the kingdom of Romania before 1918, comprising the Danubian provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia.

3. Antall's statement was made on 13 August 1990, reported by MTI of that date.

4. Indeed, the editor of *Szentkorona*, László Romhányi, was sentenced on charges of incitement for his anti-Semitic and anti-Romanian articles, Hungarian Radio, 8 February 1993, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1610 B/5, 11 February 1993.

5. As reported by Hungarian Radio, 26 February 1993, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1627 B/1, 3 March 1993.

6. Edith Oltay, 'Hungarian Democratic Forum opts for Centrist Policy', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 9 (26 February 1993).

7. A good illustration of this was the softening of the attitude of the Defence Minister, Lajos Für. In February 1992, he declared that the Hungarian government and parliament should do everything in their power using legal and diplomatic means to guarantee the survival of the minorities (MTI, 20 February 1992). A year later, he was giving repeated reassurances to Hungary's neighbours that the Hungarian state had no hostile intentions towards any of them and that the role of the country's armed forces was solely to protect the territorial integrity of the state, Hungarian Radio, 16 February 1993, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1617 B/10, 19 February 1993.

8. Hungarian Radio, 24 December 1992, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1573 A2/1, 29 December 1992.

9. The draft was agreed by all the parliamentary parties and sent to the organisations of the minorities. It proposed self-government for all the minorities, to be funded by the state; however, it was criticised as insufficient by the representatives of the Gypsies (Roma). It was reported that there were 155 minority organisations representing 13 different groups. Hungarian Radio, 9 March 1993, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1634 B/2, 11 March 1993 and *ibid.*, 12 March 1993, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1638 B/6, 16 March 1993.

10. Quotations from Ákos Tömöry, 'Biztonságpolitika: Hadpárti mozgósítás', *Heti Világgazdaság*, 27 February 1993.
11. There have been rumours in the European press that Serbia has acquired *Scud* missiles from an ex-Warsaw Pact country.
12. Hugh Poulton, 'Rising Ethnic Tension in the Vojvodina', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 50 (18 December 1992).
13. Hungarian Radio, 27 January, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, EE/1599 C1/7, 29 January 1993.
14. The GNB project is discussed in Karoly Okolicsanyi, 'Slovak-Hungarian Tension: Bratislava Diverts the Danube', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 49 (11 December 1992).
15. The election coalition of Coexistence (representing the interests of Hungarians and other minorities in Czechoslovakia) and the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement together gained 76 per cent of the minority vote in the 1992 elections.
16. Details in Jan Obrman, 'The Slovak Government versus the Media', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 6 (5 February 1993).
17. See Adele Kalniczky, 'Academic Freedom in Slovakia: the Case of Trnava University', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 11 (12 March 1993).
18. Details in Michael Shafir, 'Romania's Elections: More change than Meets the Eye', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 44 (6 November 1992).
19. Michael Shafir, 'The HDFR Congress: Confrontations Postponed', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 9 (26 February 1993).
20. This table is adapted from André Liebich, 'Minorities in Eastern Europe: Obstacles to a Reliable Count', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 20 (15 May 1992).