

## **Understanding Organizational Pluralism within National Minorities: An Explorative Study on the Cases of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia**

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### **Abstract**

The paper examines the prospects of political pluralism within national minority communities, that is, whether these minorities are represented by a single ethnic party or by multiple ones. The focus is on four communities: the Turks in Bulgaria, the Albanians in Macedonia, and the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia. Special attention is devoted to the strategies adopted by the ethnic parties representing these groups (most importantly participation in government) in order to understand the logic behind the appearance of different splinter groups and alternative organizations, and their chances for success. The conclusion is that contrarily to an argument that can be found in the literature, ethnic parties are not particularly vulnerable to assuming governmental office, though the choice of such a strategy undoubtedly entails risks by offering ammunition for rival organizations. Rather, the success of alternative ethnic parties depends heavily on the structural characteristics of the group, as well as on the opportunities of entry into the political system. The organizational divisions within the ethnic groups can be classified into two categories: alternative parties formed with the aid of some of the elites of the majorities with the explicit intention of weakening the main ethnic parties, and rival parties formed because of disagreement about the strategy that should be adopted, which usually demand more a more radical strategy.

### **Introduction**

The political participation of national minorities is an exciting and increasingly studied aspect of modern democracies. Few countries in the world are ethnically homogenous, most states are the homes of groups of considerable size that differ from the majority of the population in cultural, linguistic or ethnic terms. Moreover, these difference more frequently than not also become relevant from a political point of view, as demands and interests of the minority and the majority clash. The participation of national minorities in the political life of the state is often accomplished through ethnic parties, the groups preferring to send their inputs to the polity through their own political organizations instead of seeking access through “mainstream” parties.

It is a frequently encountered point of view that voting along ethnic lines is perhaps the most stable pattern of electoral behavior, because members of national minorities overwhelmingly support the parties that act on behalf of the ethnic communities. Some go as

far as to state that elections become no more than ethnic head counts (Horowitz 1985). However, relatively little attention is dedicated to what happens inside the minorities.

Kanchan Chandra (2005) argues that the monolithic view about ethnic groups is due to reliance on primordialist assumptions about ethnicity. It is the legacy of the early models of ethnic politics (especially the theories of ethnic outbidding put forward by Rabushka & Shepsle 1972 and Horowitz 1985) that national minorities are considered to be compact, homogeneous groups, and the electoral basis of ethnic parties the most stable within a particular party system. These works assumed that all individuals within an ethnic group have identical preferences and the preferences of individuals belonging to different ethnic groups are diametrically opposed. Moreover, these desires are seen to be the same over time, and the ethnic issue the only salient one in the party competition. (Chandra 2005: 236).

The neglect of intra-minority dynamics and their institutionalization in different configurations of ethnic parties is probably also due to fact that minority parties are regarded to be of secondary importance relative to the main actors in the system, unless they really come to dominate the party system, with the ethnic cleavage becoming the main divide in the polity. Aside these cases, ethnic parties are usually small parties, most of the time seen as being interested in a single issue, the ethnic one. Along these lines, when they come into focus, the question is rather whether they are detrimental or benefic to democracy and the stability of the polity (Shepsle and Rabushka 1972, Horowitz 1985, Birnir 2006, but also Chandra 2005), than whether they succeed in providing adequate representation for all the segments of the groups they claim to stand for.

While these are undoubtedly very important issues, the fact that the possibility of meaningful choice for members of minority groups may be much more constrained than for majority voters is simply not considered to be of sufficient relevance. However, in many cases it may be that the plurality of political options that is taken for granted for the majority is denied to the minority (Bochsler 2006), which raises serious issues in democratic theory. The existence or lack of pluralism may also have negative consequences for the performance and the accountability of the ethnic parties, because if a party does not have to compete with others but gets reelected easily, then it will have fewer incentives to achieve.

Moreover, the existence or lack of political pluralism within minority groups may have consequences on the functioning and the stability of the whole polity too. Some argue that multiple ethnic parties may be desirable because of the dangers posed by a single ethnic party going radical (Bochsler 2006), or more generally, the number of important political actors within the minority may impact the behavior of the whole group. On the other hand, the

excessive political fragmentation within the minority may be detrimental for the prospects of efficient representation, and it may even endanger their representation by posing problems of strategic coordination (Cox 1997).

This research aims to take some steps down this rather unexplored path, by addressing the issue of political and organizational pluralism within the minority groups. While assessing the factors that encourage or work against plurality is a rather ambitious goal, in this short paper I will only concentrate on a few cases in the fashion of a plausibility probe, trying to identify similarities and differences between them.

In the first section of the paper I review some of the relevant literature, paying special attention to the definitional issue, as the insights that can be gained from previous work on this topic are very much conditioned by these choices. Second, I will present four cases (the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, the Turks in Bulgaria and Albanians in The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), in order to illustrate the possible scenarios going on within minorities. In the third section I will attempt to come up with a possible explanation for the phenomenon based on the similarities and differences between these cases, and connect it to the theoretical framework. Finally, I will outline possible paths for continuing the research.

### **National minorities and ethnic/(ethno)regional parties**

The concept of ethnicity and ethnic groups is not an easy one, given the arguments of the constructivist, who point out that ethnicity is not simply given and exogenous. Constructivists argue that ethnic identities are fluid and malleable, shaped by social, economic and political processes. Individuals may have multiple identities, and which becomes salient will depend on the context. The assumption that individuals have a single, fixed ethnic identity is a *primordialist* standpoint, considered today to be outdated and falsified (Chandra 2001: 7). As a consequence, when it comes to voting behavior, ethnic demography does not determine the maximum number of voters that ethnic parties may aspire to mobilize, it only constrains or facilitates it. The only limit comes from competition over votes with other parties (Alonso 2005:4). Indeed, this seems to be confirmed by several ethnic or ethno-regionalist parties, most importantly the Catalan *Convergència I Unió*, which advocates a rather inclusive version of nationalism, accepting anyone to be Catalan if he or she feels so, or sympathizes with the goals of the party (Barbera & Barrio 2006: 113-114). But the example of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms could also be cited, this party trying constantly to frame itself as a liberal party concerned foremost with human rights instead of defining itself as the party of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

Notwithstanding the constructivist arguments, the main underlying assumption of this research is that ethnic parties represent a specific distinct category among political parties due to the fact that the pool of their potential supporters is very limited or narrow, when compared to that of the “mainstream” parties, as it does not differ significantly from the ethnic group itself. Empirical reality shows that even if one accepts that ethnicity is not an exogenous category, the possibility of ethnically based parties to expand their potential electorate beyond the ethnic group remains rather limited. The logic of building multi-ethnic parties usually evolves the other way round. It is the major parties from a system who might decide to open towards certain minorities (as in the case of some Estonian or Latvian parties that appeal to the Russian minorities), and not the organizations of the minorities who can try to forgo the support of a considerable part of the ethnic group and substitute it with votes from the rest of the population. The argument put forward by Stephen Van Evera regarding the nature of ethnicity seems more convincing. He argues that despite the socially constructed nature of ethnic identities the assumption of fixed ethnic identity should not be dropped, because once constructed, ethnic identities are extremely difficult to reconstruct, especially in modern times, and especially among groups in conflict (van Evera 2001: 20).

Unfortunately, the concept of ethnic parties is even less clear. In the past decade there have been sustained efforts to gain recognition for the existence of a distinct party family, called the ethno-regionalist one, but at the same time it seems that is it the very ethnic nature of these parties that proved to be disposable (De Winter & Türsan 1998, De Winter et al 2006, but also the panel of the ECPR Joint Sessions of 2003 called “Building a Party Family: Comparing Regionalist Parties” point into this direction). The emphasis is more on the regional element than on the ethnic or minority character of these parties, and the focus is almost exclusively on regionalized or regionalizing Western-European states (Belgium, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, or even France). This literature becomes even intertwined with the study of multi-level electoral competition (see the special issue of *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 10 (3), July 2003). While this is definitely an interesting field, it departs from the issue of the representation of national minorities. Some parties that qualify as successful (ethno)-regionalist parties do not represent minorities (e.g. the Belgian case), while others don't even have anything to do with ethnicity (e.g. the Northern League in Italy or some regionalist parties in Spain like the Coalición Canaria or the Partido Andalucista).

In this research I am interested in the political representation of minority groups rather than of territories, even if there may be an overlap between the two. Consequently, only those parties qualify that put forward demands on behalf of an ethnic group that is “numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language” (Capotorti 1979: 96).<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the demands put forward by these parties, the (ethno)regionalist line in the literature stresses the aim to redefine the center-periphery relationship with regards to a specific territory or group (Miodownik & Cartrite 2006), which means the political reorganization of the existing national power structure, some kind of self-government (de Winter 1998). However, this requirement would be too strong, because quite a few minorities are not in the situation to have so serious demands. Consequently, any demands made on behalf of the group that are justified on the grounds of its cultural distinctiveness should qualify.

### **Possible goals and strategies of ethnic parties**

Despite using the definition quoted above, which implies demands for some sort of self-government, de Winter also offers a classification of ethno-regionalist parties, depending on their goals. The first category is that of the *protectionist* parties, whose main goal is the preservation of the ethnic or national identity of the group they represent, and they demand rights from the state in order to ensure this (language rights, abolition of discrimination). The second category comprises *autonomist* parties, which demand more autonomy or self-government for the region in which they activate (or we might add, cultural autonomy for the group). This is what distinguishes them from *federalist* parties, which aim for more powers not only for their own region, but want to accomplish this in all regions of the state. The final two categories refer to more radical parties, which openly challenge the state and imagine the future of the region or the group outside it. *Independist* parties aim for the creation of a new independent state, while *irredentist* parties would join another state instead of the one they belong to in the present (usually the kin-state of the minority) (de Winter 1998: 205-207).

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible to further differentiate between *ethnic minorities* and *national minorities*, on the grounds that ethnic minorities do not have a kin state, while national minorities do (Girasoli 1995). However, this is not relevant for my purposes.

De Winter also distinguishes three ideal-typical strategies that might be pursued by these parties (as a matter of fact, any party, not only the (ethno)regionalist ones). Some parties may adopt an *anti-system stance*, being reluctant to accept the rules of the game and sometimes employing anti-democratic means of promoting their demands, like violence or terrorism. The second strategy is the *tribune strategy*, which means acceptance of the democratic rules of the game, but an unwillingness to assume governmental responsibility, but rather voicing demands deliberately from opposition, using both parliamentary and extraparliamentary means. Finally, some ethnic parties might decide to pursue their goals by *participating in government* (de Winter 1998: 230). Argelaguet (2003) adds that the anti-system-ness may be also a consequence of the other parties' efforts to render the party as such, for instance by continuously refusing to cooperate, as in the case of Vlaams Blok in Flanders, which has been marginalized not because of the use of violence, but because of the extreme-right elements on its agenda. This also points to the fact that the boundaries of these categories are not clear-cut, but rather depend on the strategies of the other parties too. In certain cases already an autonomist stance may lead to stigmatization as separatists or irredentists, and the nationalist parties of the majority will not hesitate to abuse of these epithets in order to increase their support by instigating against minorities and displaying themselves as protectors of the majority nation.

The definitions and the classification presented so far all assume that the ethnic parties would be primarily policy oriented, and the strategies they adopt would simply depend on the perception about which of these would best serve the goals of the party and implicitly the minority group. However, since Anthony Downs' (1957) seminal work we also know that parties formulate policies in order to win elections, and not the other way round. While this is again an exaggerated view of party behavior, Kaare Strom argued that the behavior of any party can be best described by positioning it in a space defined by the dimensions of office-seeking, vote-seeking and policy-seeking (Strom 1990)

The assumption that ethnic parties would be primarily policy oriented is not necessarily a completely unrealistic one, especially in the incipient phases of their existence. The fact that many of them emerge from broad social movements is one piece of evidence that supports this possibility. On the other hand, there are also arguments claiming that ethnic politics is best understood as ethnic entrepreneurship, that is, leaders mobilize on the ethnic cleavage because ethnicity is a cheap and highly effective way for obtaining office (cite someone). Whichever would be the more realistic approach, at a certain point it becomes unavoidable for ethnic parties to face the dilemma regarding what strategy to pursue. A very

radical, anti-system strategy is very costly, and may easily backfire, leading to political isolation or even being banned. Staying in opposition allows for maintaining ideological purity and more radical demands, but still runs the risk of remaining isolated and unable to reach any of the goals. Conversely, assuming office has its own perils, as discussed below.

There is a considerable literature about the negative electoral consequences of assuming governmental office. The main argument in the “negative incumbency effect” literature is that support for the government is explained by a function of economic and political outcomes (the so-called vote-popularity function or simply VP function). Though both economic and political events should matter for the judgment of incumbents, the economic dimension is much better operationalized than the political one, consequently the most important explanatory mechanism is retrospective economic voting. Though estimates of this cost vary (Nannestad & Paldam 1994), and considerable efforts have also been devoted to differentiate the costs of ruling depending on the type of cabinet, type of electoral system or the role played by the parties in the cabinet (Narud & Valen 2005), there seems to be pretty much agreement that ruling costs the incumbents, especially if their performance is not flawless.

A logically similar argument has been put forward for the participation of ethnic parties in government, though implying even more serious consequences. De Winter argues that mainstream parties are keen to invite ethnoregionalist parties to govern whenever they need them, because they are the least demanding partners on issues unrelated to the ethnoregional agenda. Moreover, he goes further to claim that the invitation may be motivated by an explicit intention of weakening these parties. Assuming governmental office may have negative electoral consequences because in case of failure to reform the state as fast and profoundly as they promised (which was the manifest reason for their participation in the cabinet), their electorate will punish them. Furthermore, by participating in government, they will have to make and defend compromises with the other ethnic groups, blemishing their puritan profile. Finally, they have to define clear positions on other policies, which might hurt part of their electorate (de Winter 2006: 30/31). We might add that failure to deal with other issues than the ethnic one is not a real option, because doing so will lead to accusations from the majority that the party purses only particularistic goals and does not care about the fate of the country, and from here the suspicions about separatism and hidden agendas are only one step away (Hamberger 2004).

Tough tentative, De Winter’s argument is weakened by the fact that it is based on the very special case of two regionalist parties from Belgium, the Flemish *Volksumie* and the

Francophone *Rassemblement Wallon*. Argelaguet (2003) notices a similar scenario in the case of the *Northern League* in Italy, however, this is problematic too. As discussed above, these cases do not conform to the definition of ethnic parties denoting parties standing for national minorities. *Lega Nord* has nothing to do with ethnicity, while the Belgian parties are not minorities, despite the high salience of the linguistic divide. While it may be true that there are not too many examples of ethnic parties participating in *national* governments in western democracies (the *Swedish People's Party* in Finland is perhaps the exception discussed also by Argelaguet 2003), one should not attempt to generalize before taking into account Central and Eastern Europe, a region which obviously offers better opportunities to study the electoral consequences of the governmental participation of ethnic parties.

Notwithstanding the limited empirical support of the arguments about the negative incumbency effect for ethnic parties, the decision to join a government becomes a critical one, because it is unlikely that it will be supported unanimously within the group, and this may lead to splits, which in turn may endanger the representation of the group, given the limited pool of votes available. While this dilemma is present for any kind of parties, it is reasonable to argue that it will be especially acute in the case of ethnic parties, because the compromises entailed by entering a coalition will require moderation of the ethnic demands, as in many cases the partners from the majority will be unwilling to accommodate more radical requests. Giving up on some goals offers a very good opportunity for dissenters to put forward a different (most often more radical) agenda, and to turn the ethnic issue into a valence issue (Stokes 1963, Budge&Farlie 1983, Kitschelt 199?), by trying to picture themselves as being more competent to solve the problems of the community than the actual ruling elite, which might even be declared as having betrayed the group by subordinating its needs to personal office-seeking ambitions. Moreover, given that ethnic groups are far from being homogenous entities, it is more likely that also ideological differences will be higher than within parties already organized around ideological positions. Whether or not the intentions of the rivals are really policy oriented or are rather driven by disappointment over office allocation is of secondary importance, the point is that such strategic decisions offer good opportunities or pretexts for rivals to challenge the actual leadership, which may in turn lead to the appearance of new ethnic organizations.

One of the most appealing theoretical models for the study of political pluralism within ethnic groups is Gary Cox's theory about strategic coordination. Strategic electoral coordination refers to the ability of a group of potential candidates to reach equilibrium

between the demand and the supply side of the electoral market: that is, fielding the optimal number of candidates or party lists in light of the available electoral support. This will depend primarily on the nature of the electoral system and on the characteristics of the group, but also on agency-related factors, namely, the motivations and perceptions of the leaders. Most importantly, coordination will succeed only if both voters and politicians are short-term instrumentally rational. This basically means that both voters and competitors should care most about the outcome of the current election, and not about securing long-term dominance within the party or ideological camp. In the latter cases the game becomes a multiple-shot affair, and in repeated games one of the most profitable strategies is to be tough in early rounds. By battling in the first round each faction demonstrates its patience and commitment, but coordination may fail (Cox, 1997).

The main problem with Cox's argument is that it assumes that the maximum payoff for both voters and candidates can only be obtained when the group gets represented. However, if we accept that all leaders are office seekers (as for instance Downs asserts), then candidates will care more about their own representation than about that of the group. In this case they will not care about coordinating, and the only strategy would be to run irrespective of the decisions of the other candidates. Moreover, some might be even motivated by revenge or the desire to prove their blackmail potential having in mind future iterations of the game. Of course, all things being equal, the costs of deliberately refusing to coordinate will depend on the institutions available to sanction such dissenters within the community (which are sometimes controlled by the hegemonic elite of the group), and the costs of entry into the political system.

In the second part of the paper I will explore the issue of political and organizational pluralism on four cases, trying to point out the incidence of strategic decisions and coordination, as well as the impact of the structural characteristics of the groups and of institutions. The cases are the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the Albanians from The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

## **The evolution of national minority parties in four Central and Eastern European states: Romania, Slovakia, Macedonia and Bulgaria**

### **Slovakia**

Immediately after the fall of communism three ethnic Hungarian parties have been established in Slovakia. The first to emerge was the *Hungarian Free Initiative* (HFI), created

by liberal intellectuals in November 1989. The HFI maintained close ties with the Slovak umbrella movement Public Against Violence (*Verejnost' proti násiliu* – VPN), and at the 1990 elections it participated on its lists, obtaining five seats in the Slovak National Council. The conception of the HFI about the minority issue was based on human rights, and they advocated cooperation between the democratic forces regardless of nationality. The party believed that transition to democracy should enjoy priority over the problems of the minorities. They also advocated political pluralism within the Hungarian community, and encouraged the cooperation of ethnic Hungarian and Slovak parties along ideological lines. This was deemed especially important because the HFI advocated from the beginning a governmental strategy, and believed that through the cooperation across the ethnic divide along ideological lines the minority will always be able to participate in power. The HFI registered as a political party in 1992 and changed its name to *Hungarian Civic Party* (HCP) (Öllös 2004).

After the 1990 elections HFI received one ministerial position in the new cabinet (one of the vice-premiers). During the discussions between the Civic Forum, the Public Against Violence and the socialist federal government lead by Marián Čalfa, the HFI was also promised the creation of a ministry responsible for national minorities issues at the federal level, and the right to nominate the minister. However, eventually Čalfa did not agree to create this office. HFI wanted to nominate the well known human rights activist Miklós Duray for this office that has been never created. The failure convinced Duray that the Hungarian minority must go its own way instead of trying to integrate along ideological lines into the Slovak majority parties, consequently he created another organization in January 1990, called *Coexistence*. The party advocated a “constructive opposition” strategy, and called for all Hungarian organizations to join forces in a single political organization. Coexistence initially tried to integrate the other minorities too, and did not devote too much attention to other issues than the minority question. This party was also the one which voiced the most autonomist demands too (Gyurcsík 1996, Bárdi 1999, Öllös 2004, Szarka 2004).

The third Hungarian party was the *Hungarian Christian-Democratic Movement* (HCDM), established in January 1990. Its creation has been aided by the Catholic Church. In the beginning HCDM sought a partnership with the Slovak Christian Democrats, but this did not last for long because of disagreements about the minority issue. Consequently HCDM allied itself with Coexistence for the 1990 elections, and the identity of the two parties was difficult to distinguish in the first legislature. However, after Béla Bugár took over the leadership of the HCDM, the party started to evolve into the most important Hungarian

political actor in Slovakia, pursuing a Christian-democratic ideology. Consequently by the time of the merger of the Hungarian parties in 1998, it was HCDM which had the most powerful bargaining position (Öllös 2004, Szarka 2004).

A less important organization, the *Hungarian People's Party* (HPP) was formed in the summer of 1991 by a splinter group from Coexistence, who were joined by some politicians expelled from HCDM. The choice of the name was meant to assume continuity with the main Hungarian organization from Czechoslovakia from the short post World War II democratic period. The leaders of HPP expressed their dissatisfaction with the behavior of the three parties represented in legislature, especially the fact that they voted in 1990 the law which established the Slovak language as the only official language of the country. The party called for the rallying of all Hungarian organizations into a single party. However, it did not succeed to garner significant support, and finally it merged into the single party that was created in 1998. HPP obtained four local counselor's seats at the 1994 local elections (Szarka 2004: 85, Gyurcsík 1996).

The four Hungarian parties discussed so far merged in 1998 to create the *Party of Hungarian Coalition* (PHC), which consequently became the hegemonic political organization of the Hungarians in Slovakia. The merger has been preceded by two electoral coalitions in 1992 and 1994, motivated by the introduction of electoral thresholds. For a single party the threshold has been set to 4%, for coalitions of two or three parties to 7%, while for four-member alliances to 10%. Given that the Hungarian community amounted to 10,8% of the population according to the 1991 census, a coalition of three parties would have been the safe solution. The discussions from 1992 were only partly successful, the HCP has been left out of the coalition, ran alone in the elections and failed to pass the 4% threshold. Coexistence, HCDM and HPP ran together as members of the *Hungarian Coalition* and obtained 7,42%, just enough to pass the 7% threshold. The failure of reaching an agreement with HCP had two main reasons. First, Coexistence and HCP had diametrically opposed conceptions about the handling of the minority issue, consequently Coexistence constantly criticized the governmental performance of HCP. Second, Coexistence imagined a long-term cooperation of the Hungarian parties or even a merger, while HCP wished to maintain political pluralism within the community (Öllös 2004). At the next elections in 1994 the agreement between all the four Hungarian parties existing by that time has finally been reached. The new Hungarian Coalition was formally an electoral alliance of three parties, with HPP representatives participating on the list as independents. Due to its absence from the

parliament in the previous cycle HCP had to accept very tough conditions, and received only a single safe seat on the common list (Szarka 2004).

In 1998 the electoral law has been changed again, this time creating an even more difficult situation for the Hungarian parties. While the thresholds remained unchanged, a very restrictive new element has been introduced: each party within a coalition had to reach 5%, otherwise the whole coalition would have remained without representation. The new regulations were deliberately adopted by the Meciar government in order to weaken the opposition (Mesežnikov 2001). The new regulations ruled out repeatedly employing the three-party electoral coalition for the Hungarian parties. While the initial idea was to establish a purely electoral party and allowing for double membership in this party and each candidate's own party, this has been ruled out as being too dangerous, because of the possibility of being banned because of resembling too much an electoral coalition. Consequently the merger remained the only viable option. After several very tense months of debates and bargaining about the organizational aspects and the distribution of offices, in June 1998 the first congress of the Party of Hungarian Coalition (PHC) takes place. HCDM receives the presidency of the new party, the former Coexistence chairman becomes honorary chairman, and the two vice-presidents are from HCDM and HCP. The party statute also allowed the existence of two platforms in the party, one Christian-democratic and one liberal (the share of the two platforms was 80:20). However, the platforms failed to play an important role in channeling the disagreements within the party, and later they have been abolished. In a few years the party transformed itself in a centralized organization, but none of the leaders of the previously existing parties have been ousted (Öllös 2004, Szarka 2004).

The HCP entered the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda in 1998, and has been in government until 2006. In the first cabinet it held three ministries, while in the second four and later five. Since 2006 the party has been in opposition after the new winners (Robert Fico's Smer) did not invite them to govern. However, HCP did not exclude the possibility of participating in government, had they been invited. While in government, the PHC did not voice any demands for autonomy, instead it tried to obtain the creation of a district with Hungarian majority in the process of the administrative reform, but failed.

The remaining two Hungarian parties in Slovakia have been challengers of the HCP. The *Hungarian Popular Movement for Reconciliation and Welfare* (HPMRW) appeared in 1995, and participated at the parliamentary elections of 1998. Its president was a former expelled member of Coexistence. The establishment of the party has been aided by the Meciar

government, aiming to divide the Hungarian vote (Szarka 2004). HPMRW later split into two smaller organizations, the *Hungarian Socialist Party* (HSP) and the *Party of Hungarian Socialists in Slovakia* (PHSS). In an interview in 2001 the president of HPMRW and later HSP admitted having a close relationship with Meciar's HZDS, but stated that they would be willing to reconcile with the Party of Hungarian Coalition. The leader of the PHSS stated his intention of negotiating with the PHC about creating a new social-democratic platform in the party (*Új Szó*, 10 August 2001). None of these organizations is still active today.

In 2001 one more ethnic Hungarian party appeared, called *Hungarian Federalist Party* (HFP). Its creation has been allegedly aided by the World Federation of Hungarians (though some WFH leaders from Slovakia denied this), which by that time became a rather radical organization. The emergence of the party coincided with the coalitional crisis of 2001 when PHC was on the verge of leaving Dzurinda's cabinet because of clashes with the other parties over the administrative reform, but finally did not do so. The HFP put forward a much more radical discourse than the Party of Hungarian Coalition, and defined itself against this party. It voiced more radical demands (like autonomy and the revocation of the Benes decrees), organized mass demonstrations and criticized the PHC for abandoning these issues (Governmental Office For Hungarian Minorities Abroad 2006). The HFP participated only at the 2002 local elections (obtaining 20 seats in the local councils) and the 2004 elections for the European Parliament, but obtained a negligible result. The party was a member of the European Free Alliance. It was banned in 2005 (together with lots of other small parties, probably the HSP and the PHSS too), because of failing to comply with the registration requirements of the new law on political parties in Slovakia (EFA press release 2005).

## **Romania**

As opposed to Slovakia, the Hungarian minority in Romania had been represented in the parliament by a single organization since 1990, the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania* (DAHR). The DAHR is not registered as a political party even today, but as an NGO. This, however, does not mean that it does not operate as a political party.

From the very beginning the DAHR has been a very factionalized organization, yet it succeeded to survive without splitting for a relatively long time, although the internal fights became more and more visible as time passed. At the price of gross simplification, the main division within the party can be described as an opposition between the autonomist, more radical wing, and a more moderate or pragmatic group which advocated a strategy of small steps for securing minority rights, and was more willing to compromise with the majority.

Formulated in de Winter's terms, on one side there were the autonomists (and even some federalists), who advocated a tribune strategy and a more policy-oriented stance, while the other side could be characterized as rather pursuing protectionist goals, and they were also more open towards assuming governmental office, which later attracted the blame of being excessively office oriented. The divide regarding strategy was more or less overlapping with a generational divide too.

Despite the relatively strong position of the autonomists in the early years and the very central role played by the concept in the discourse of the party, the DAHR did not succeed in developing a well-defined and clearly elaborated conception of autonomy, although several drafts have been elaborated between 1990 and 1995, and the parliamentary groups of the party solemnly swore in 1992 to pursue self-government for the Hungarian minority. The inability to elaborate and defend a clear conception about autonomy contributed to a slow polarization between the camps adopting different positions regarding self-government within the DAHR (Bakk 1999).

At the third congress of the DAHR in 1993 a new organizational form has been adopted, called the self-government model. The background idea was that the Hungarian minority in Romania should be considered a fully-fledged society, and in the absence of the institutions of self-government the DAHR should transform itself into some sort of informal substitute for these institutions. Consequently the new organizational form has been modeled after the organizational buildup of states, following the principle of the separation of powers. An internal parliament has been set up, called the Council of the Representatives of the Alliance (CRA), and the already existing ideological groupings have been formally recognized as platforms, so they could continue their activity as factions in the CRA. The CRA met at least once in two months, and its members should have been elected periodically by internal elections (Bakk 1999). However, the elections have never been organized, and this finally led to irreconcilable tensions within the DAHR.

Following its creation, the CRA became the arena for hot debates about the political strategy to be followed, but also around personal conflicts. Nevertheless, the DAHR succeeded to avoid splits by decentralizing its organization, and this probably contributed to maintaining or improving its bargaining power at the national level. This seems to be in line with the argument put forward by Moshe Maor (1998) about the relation between decentralization of party organization and bargaining power. However, after assuming governmental office, the powers of the CRA have been gradually decreased, and shifted to the central executive of the party (Márton 2005).

Although after the solemn declaration of 1992 and the adoption of the “state model” the autonomists seemed to be more powerful, the distribution of power slowly but constantly shifted in favor of the pragmatic wing. The most important events that contributed to this shift have been the signing of the bilateral treaty between Hungary and Romania, and the participation in government after 1996. Regarding the bilateral treaty, the DAHR struggled for years and lobbied the Hungarian government to request the inclusion of guarantees about collective rights for the Hungarian minority. However, no such measure has been incorporated into the treaty, and as a consequence the DAHR felt that the Hungarian government subordinated the issue of the Hungarian minority in Romania to the goal of obtaining NATO membership. The signing of the treaty also meant that the autonomists could count on less external support for their efforts. The event also pointed out the limits of the opposition strategy pursued that far, and urged the DAHR leadership to orient themselves toward governmental participation (Bakk 1999, Toró 1999).

In 1996 the DAHR joined the government coalition formed by the anticommunist forces who finally succeeded to win the elections against the post-communist Party of Social Democracy in Romania. The Hungarians received two ministries, health care and a minister responsible for national minorities. In 1998 the DAHR threatened by leaving the coalition because of the reluctance of its partners to settle the issue of the Hungarian language state university in Cluj/Kolozsvár, but finally refrained from doing so. The decision of joining the coalition has been a very controversial one, because according to the statute of the DAHR this should have been decided by the CRA, but in reality it was decided by the central executive, and only later submitted to the internal parliament for ratification.

In 2000 the Social Democrats returned to power, but were unable to form a coalition. This was mainly due to the unprecedented strengthening of the extremist Greater Romania Party, which obtained around 25% of the seats in both chambers, but was unacceptable as a coalition partner, given the overarching goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. DAHR accepted to offer parliamentary support to the party that has been one of its main enemies before, in exchange for some offices at the local level and policy concessions regarding the Hungarian minority. The decision to cooperate with the former communists caused heavy dissent within the internal opposition.

In 2004 the center-right coalition returned to power, and so did the DAHR. This time it received four ministries. The chairman of the DAHR became deputy prime minister responsible for education and culture, and the Hungarians nominated also the ministers of public constructions and territorial management, of telecommunication and of commerce.

Later the deputy PM function has been abolished, in exchange DAHR obtained the ministry of environment.

The DAHR was eager to participate in any government to form after the 2008 elections (despite naming as the first preference the continuation of the coalition with the National Liberal Party). However, it was finally left out of the cabinet due to a surprise agreement between the Social Democrats and the Democratic Liberal Party. While the latter seemed ready to include the DAHR too, the Social Democrats vetoed this. It is interesting to note that after losing governmental office, the DAHR quickly shifted its rhetoric and demanded the adoption of consociative arrangements that would ensure the proportional representation of ethnic Hungarians in public office, while in the preceding 12 years while in power they never voiced such demands.

The DAHR succeeded to avoid splits until 2003. However, four years of governmental participation and later the parliamentary support given to the minority government contributed to the marginalization of the autonomist wing within the party. In 2003, the internal opposition (called the *Reform Group* platform - RG) decided not to participate at the seventh congress of the DAHR, because the internal elections (that have been constantly postponed for almost ten years) were not included on the agenda of the this congress either. Moreover, the honorary chairman of the DAHR and leader of the more radical internal opposition wing (the bishop László Tőkés) threatened to sue the DAHR because of failing to organize the internal elections again, despite a decision of the Congress existed on this issue since 1993. Because of this the Congress stripped him of his function.

As a consequence the RG platform disbanded itself within the DAHR, and some of its members left the party. However, both Tőkés and other two prominent leaders of the RG remained DAHR members, while in parallel they began to build alternative organizations. Some of these alternative organizations were not intended to be political parties (like the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania and the Szekler National Council), but rather umbrella organizations aiming to promote the goal of autonomy. In the meantime, some more radical former RG members started to organize a new party too. The core of this new party (initially called *Hungarian Civic Alliance*) centered around the city of Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely, and the mayor of this locality. However, the party failed to register in 2004 before the local elections, due to the fact that the electoral law has been changed, and contained very restrictive conditions for registering new organizations (25000 signatures from 16 counties including Bucharest, but no less than 300 signatures from each

county). It must also be mentioned that the DAHR eagerly voted the amendment of this law in the parliament. As a consequence of the inability to register, some members of the Civic Alliance chose to run on the lists of a small Romanian party at the 2004 local and parliamentary elections, but with very limited success.

However, in 2007 the organizations defining themselves as the alternative of the DAHR registered a very important success. László Tőkés ran as an independent candidate for the European Parliament in 2007 and got elected. The distribution of the votes between the DAHR and Tőkés has been close to 60:40%, which represented a very serious challenge to the DAHR. However, this also proved to be the most significant success of the opposition up to now.

The Hungarian Civic Alliance has been supported in its efforts to organize by the main right-wing party from Hungary, Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance (the choice of the name is obviously not a coincidence). As a result of this backing, this alternative Hungarian party did not disappear, but finally succeeded to register in 2008, and participate at the local elections. Now called *Hungarian Civic Party* (HCP), the organization obtained 488 seats in the local councils, 19 seats in the county councils, elected 11 mayors and obtained absolute majority in 6 local councils. As a comparison, the results of the DAHR were 2196, 89, 184 and 155. Regarding the votes, the ratio of DAHR and HCP came close to 80:20. This was an obviously weaker result than the one obtained by Tőkés at the EP elections, moreover, all the significant results of the HCP were obtained in two counties situated in the Szekler region, where the proportion of the Hungarian population is above 75%, the party remained insignificant in the ethnically mixed areas. At the 2008 parliamentary elections the HCP did not present its own list, instead it supported several independent candidates who ran against the DAHR. However, these independents failed to garner more than 10% of the votes of the ethnic Hungarian population from Harghita and Covasna counties. Moreover, the turnout rate has been below the average in these two counties with Hungarian population, in Covasna the second lowest in the country.<sup>2</sup>

After running as an independent in 2007, Tőkés accepted to lead the list of the DAHR for the 2009 elections for the European Parliament. DAHR nominated the candidates for the second and third places of the list, while the organization led by Tőkés (the Hungarian National Council from Transylvania) nominated the fourth candidate, who still may have theoretical chances of being elected. However, the DAHR and the National Council will run

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<sup>2</sup> Data from the Romanian Central Electoral Bureau, [www.beclocale2008.ro](http://www.beclocale2008.ro) and [www.becparlamentare2008.ro](http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro).

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separate campaigns. The *Hungarian Civic Party* has not been invited to be part of the agreement.

Regarding the *Hungarian Civic Party* the latest developments are not very promising, because the first congress in March 2009 ended up in scandal. The chairman of the party seeking reelection, Jenő Szász, attempted to pack the congress by proposing that the “guests” should also have the right to vote in the election of the leadership. Because of this many delegates refused to participate in the further proceedings of the congress and left, while the president has been reelected with the overwhelming support of those who stayed. Even HCP members admitted that such practices were not to be seen even in the DAHR (*Krónika*, 15 March 2009).

So far, the challenge posed by the *Hungarian Civic Party* has been the most serious that the DAHR had to face in its almost two-decade history. Some other fringe Hungarian or putatively Hungarian organizations existed also before, but these were never able to reach significant support. The best known case was the *Free Hungarian Party*, which later changed its name to *Hungarian Liberal Democratic Party*. This party declared the autonomist goals of the DAHR as being illegitimate and only leading to the deterioration of the interethnic relationships. The party ran at the 1990, 1996 and 2000 parliamentary elections, but was never able to secure representation. It obtained only several seats in the local and county councils in 1996 and 2000. However, its most important “performance” has been registered in 2000, when the party contributed to the failure to reelect the DAHR nominated ethnic Hungarian mayor of the city of Târgu Mureş/Marosvásárhely. Though the HDLP candidate obtained only around 1% of the votes, the candidate of the DAHR received 49,78% in the first round, and has been defeated in the second round by an ethnic Romanian candidate. The DAHR blamed the HDLP for the defeat. The DAHR treated the HDLP from the very beginning as an attempt organized by the post-communist Party of Social Democracy and the secret services to divide the Hungarian vote. Whether true or not, it should be mentioned that the congresses of the HDLP have been conducted predominantly in Romanian language, and the party was even willing to negotiate with the nationalist Party for the Unity of the Romanian Nation, but it excluded any collaboration with the DAHR. (*Szabadság*, 12 August 1996; *Krónika*, 22 May 2000). Another strange thing about the HDLP is that its former vice-president entered the Romanian parliament in 2000 as the representative of the newly acknowledged Ruthenian minority.

## **Bulgaria**

The main organization of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (MRF). The Turks represented 9,4% of the population at the censuses from both 1992 and 2001, but there is also a significant Bulgarian-speaking Muslim community (the Pomaks, numbering around 140 thousands) and also a Muslim Roma community (officially almost 400.000) in the country, which the MRF claims to represent (Kostova 2001, Vassilev 2001).

After being subjected to harsh repression in the last years of the Zhivkov regime, the Turkish minority also had to face the lack of trust from part of the majority population in the early years of the transition. After the 1990 elections the nationalists organized rallies in order to prevent the MPs of the MRF to assume their positions in the National Assembly, and the constitution passed in 1991 banned the formation of political parties along ethnic or religious lines (Vassilev 2001). Before the 1992 elections, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) even questioned the legitimacy of the MRF before the Constitutional Court, but the Court ruled in favor of the MRF, establishing that it was not unconstitutional and could operate (Hajdinjak 2001: 13). After this success, the MRF gradually made the presence of the Turkish minority in public office more and more accepted, and became one of the most important players in Bulgarian politics, and the most successful ethnic party in the Central and Easter European region (at least in terms of office).

After the June 1990 elections the MRF has been invited by the BSP to participate in the grand coalition cabinet which also included the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), and which had the principal mission of passing the new constitution. However, the MRF declined, and it was only in late 1990 that it MRF decided to give up its isolationist stance. The opportunity to join the government only arose after the 1991 October elections, when only 3 parties made it into the parliament, and the MRF found itself in a pivotal position, between the two main parties that fell short of absolute majority by only a few percents of the seats. The MRF chose to provide a vote of investiture to the UDF government, but it did not join the cabinet. However, one year later they withdrew their support, mainly because of disagreements over the agricultural reform (land restitution), that was perceived as disadvantaging the mostly agrarian Turkish ethnic group (Vassilev 2001: 47). As a consequence of the stalemate that arose and the inability of the large parties to form a new government, it was finally the MRF who has been asked to propose a new prime minister in October 1992. As a result the expert government of Lyuben Berov has been formed. Despite being the party to nominate the prime minister, the MRF had only one representative in the

expert cabinet (vice-PM Yevgeny Matinchev), but even this member was an ethnic Bulgarian (Vassilev 2001).

From 1994 to 2001 the MRF was forced into opposition because at the elections in both 1994 and 1997 one of the two major Bulgarian parties secured absolute majority in the assembly. However, in 2001 a new party appeared, led by the former tsar Simeon Borissov Sakskoburggotski. While at first it seemed that the new party would endanger the monopoly of the MRF over the centre of the Bulgarian political space (Chukov 2001b), the Turkish party once again became a coalition partner. This was facilitated by the fact that the National Movement of Simeon II obtained exactly 50% of the seats, and MRF finished fourth after the two major parties that dominated Bulgarian politics before. Consequently MRF was the ideal partner, both because of its size and its centrist liberal ideology. MRF received two ministerial appointments in the government of Simeon II.

In 2005 MRF obtained the best result of its history polling 12,81% of the votes. The BSP and the MRF made a pre-election agreement to govern together, but the BSP did worse than expected, so a third coalition partner was needed. However, the Movement of Simeon II was initially reluctant to govern again with the MRF, because during the previous term there has been a big clash between the two parties regarding the privatization of the tobacco company, the MRF opposing it because a large proportion of the Turkish minority makes a living out of growing tobacco (Hajdinjak 2001: 14). Finally an agreement was reached and a new three party government sworn in. The MRF obtained three ministries: a position of deputy prime minister and minister of state policy of disasters and accidents, the ministry of environment and water, and most importantly the ministry of agriculture and forestry (Spirova 2006).

Despite being clearly an ethnic party, MRF makes considerable efforts to convey the image of a liberal party fighting for human rights, including rights of minorities. It also regularly includes ethnic Bulgarians among its candidates. The party never advocated territorial autonomy, moreover, it rejected any such demand, declaring it dangerous for national unity. The only form of autonomy that is pursued by the MRF is limited cultural autonomy. This is partly the consequence of the constitutional challenge that the party had to face in the early 1990s. While not to register the MRF would have been a highly risky decision, given the size of the ethnic Turkish population, the existence of the ban also clearly signaled that putting forward more radical demands could endanger the existence of the party (Hajdinjak 2001, Vassilev 2001).

On the other hand, one might also argue that after passing the critical moment in 1992, the constitutional regulation that threatened the existence of the MRF turned to work as a safeguard for its monopoly over the Turkish community. The formation of serious ethnic rivals became very difficult because of the existence of this article in the Constitution, while MRF became one of the central players in Bulgarian politics.

Nevertheless, there have been attempts to form alternative Turkish organizations. The first and most radical organization to appear was the *Turkish Democratic Party* (TDP), led by former MRF member Adem Kenan, which is advocating pan-Turkish ideas and the federalization of Bulgaria along ethnic lines. But the party could not be registered since it has been founded in 1991, and activates in illegality. MRF distanced itself from the TDP's calls for the federalization of Bulgaria (Chukov 2001a).

The other attempts to set up rival organizations were mostly initiatives assisted by one of the major Bulgarian political parties, with the aim of weakening the power of the MRF, but there were also some splinter groups which rebelled against the putatively dictatorial leadership of MRF chairman Ahmed Dogan, or have been expelled from the party. In 1994 the Bulgarian Socialist Party aided the formation of the *Democratic Party of Justice* by former Chief Mufti Nedim Gencev. The party obtained 24 000 votes at the 1994 elections (0,46%) and 20.000 in 1997 (0,56%).

In 1997 some opponents of Dogan within the MRF established the Initiative Council for Renewing the Movement of Rights and Freedoms. At the 1997 elections the Union of Democratic Forces offered places for members of the Initiative on its party list, and later this group led by Güner Tahir established the *National Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (NMRF). With the assistance of UDF the new party could quickly expand its organizational network, and succeeded to secure seats in some of the local councils, but it could not really challenge the hegemonic position of the MRF (Chukov 2001a, 2001b). Before the elections of 2001 the NMRF allied itself initially with the UDF, but later withdrew from the coalition just before the election, though technically their candidates remained on the ballot (ODIHR report 2001, Harper 2003).

The remainder of the splinter organizations was even less successful. The *Party of Democratic Change* led by Mehmed Hodja and later by Mokades Nalbant participated at the 1994 parliamentary elections, obtaining around 14.000 votes (0,27%). In 2001 Dogan persuaded the leadership of the party to return to MRF. (Chukov 2001a). Another splinter party has been created by long-time MRF member and leader Osman Oktay, who has been excluded from MRF in September 2001 because of allegations of appropriating several

hundred thousands USD of campaign donations (*Novinite*, 17 October 2001). Oktay formed a new party called *Movement of the Democratic Wing* (MDW) in 2003. Later MDW, the *Democractic Party of Justice* and the *Union of the Bulgarian Turks* (which is in fact the political wing of the *Association for Solidarity with the Balkan Turks*, the main organization of Bulgarian Turks who emigrated to Turkey) formed the *Balkan Democratic League*. The League participated at the 2005 election as a member of the *Rose Coalition* together with the NMRF and with some small leftist Bulgarian parties. The coalition obtained 1,3% of the votes.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the ban on ethnic parties, the MRF remained in a hegemonic position regarding the representation of the Bulgarian Turks. Moreover, it succeeded to improve its result at the last election after finally being accepted as an equal partner in the government. The ban on ethnic parties paradoxically protected the MRF from more radical rivals, but it is also clear that the major Bulgarian parties tried to exploit any personal conflict within the MRF in order to create rival organizations loyal to them.

### **Macedonia**

The Albanian community in Macedonia represented 23% of the population according to the 1994 census, and 25,17% at the 2002 census. It must be added, though, that the ethnic Albanian leaders did not accept the results of the 1991 and 1994 census as legitimate, claiming that the share of Albanians is much higher. Moreover, following the 1999 Kosovo war hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo arrived to Macedonia (Daskalovski 2004, Balalovska 2006).

The case of the Albanians from Macedonia is different from all the cases discussed so far, because of the continuous parallel existence of multiple ethnic Albanian political parties. In the first legislature elected in 1990 two ethnic Albanian parties have been represented: the *Party for Democratic Prosperity* (PDP) and the more radical *People's Democratic Party* (NDP). However, in some constituencies the two parties fielded common candidates.

The *Party for Democratic Prosperity* joined the grand coalition led by the VMRO-DPMNE in 1990, which also included the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDUM) and the Alliance of Reform Forces in Macedonia. Moreover, the VMRO-DPMNE left the coalition in 1992, while the PDP stayed, and remained part of the various cabinets led by the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.b-info.com/news/1999-11/text/nov14.bta>, [http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/borovets-and-other-destinations/id\\_10373/catid\\_99](http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/borovets-and-other-destinations/id_10373/catid_99).

SDSM. It was only ousted from power in 1998, when the VMRO-DPMNE won the elections and invited the Democratic Party of Albanians instead of the PDP.

At the second elections in 1994 the PDP lost seven out of the 17 seats it had. Moreover, after the elections a radical faction led by Arben Xhaferi broke off and formed the *Party for Democratic Prosperity of Albanians* (PDPA). In June 1997 PDPA merged with the *People's Democratic Party* (NDP), to form the *Democratic Party of Albanians* (DPA) (Skaric 2005).

Despite being weakened, PDP remained in government for the second cycle too, as the partner of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, despite the fact that the new parliament effectively operated without an opposition, as the VMRO-DPMNE boycotted the second round of the elections because of allegations of electoral fraud (Daskalovski 2004). However, in 1998 VMRO-DPMNE won the elections and PDP has been replaced in the government by the DPA. However, it is interesting to note that the two Albanian parties submitted a joint list for the proportional component of the electoral system, while in the single member districts they ran against each other (see election results presented in Skaric 2005).

In 2001 Macedonia experienced a seven-month violent civil war when the Albanian National Liberation Army organized an armed insurrection against the Macedonian government. The NLA consisted of former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters from Macedonia, but also from Kosovo and the Preshevo valley in Serbia, as well as of foreign mercenaries (Daskalovski 2004). The conflict ended after intense international mediation, and NLA leader Ali Ahmeti agreed to disarm his troops with the condition that constitutional reforms were to be made, which would clarify the position of the Albanians in Macedonia. As a result the Ohrid Framework Agreement has been signed.

Following the conflict the leaders of the NLA formed a new Albanian party, the *Democratic Union for Integration* (DUI). The DUI became quickly the strongest Albanian party, because the ability of the Liberation Army to force out institutional reforms. As a commentator put it: “the NLA succeeded to obtain in a few months what Albanian politicians had failed to achieve in a decade: an agreement signed by Macedonia’s main political parties to institute constitutional and legal changes to ensure full and equal rights for Macedonia’s Albanian community.” (Jolyon Naegele 2002a quoted in Balalovska 2006: 11).

At the 2002 elections four ethnic Albanian parties participated. DUI obtained more seats than the other three together (the PDP, the DPA and a small new party, the *National Democratic Party*, established by other former NLA members). As the strongest Albanian

party and the one who obtained the institutional reforms, DUI joined the government led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia.

In 2006 the DUI ran in coalition with the PDP, and obtained 12,12% of the votes, while PDA ran on its own and was supported by 7,5% of the electorate. The elections have been won by the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE. The new prime minister, Nikola Gruevski surprisingly invited DPA instead of DUI into the new government. The DUI was outraged because of being left out. Nevertheless, later on also PDP (which ran in an electoral alliance with DUI at the elections) has been invited to join. But after the 2008 early elections Gruevski invited DUI but not DPA ([cite something else than Wikipedia too...](#)). This may point to a deliberate strategy of the prime minister to alternate between the two larger Albanian parties, in order to avoid any of them getting excessively strengthened.

The PDP failed to obtain seats at the 2008 elections (0,53% of the vote), and later merged into the DPA. Consequently the “old” Albanian parties are once again in a single organization. In the “new” NLA-related camp there have been mergers as well as splinters too. The *National Democratic Party*, which had a distinctive programmatic appeal as compared to the other Albanian parties, namely the proposal of federalizing Macedonia (Freidman 2006: 13), merged into DUI in 2003. On the other hand another small party appeared in 2007, the *Albanian Democratic Union*, founded by former Kosovo Liberation Army member Bardhyl Mahmuti, who has also been running a party in Kosovo since 1999. It did not obtain any seats at the 2008 elections.

Except for 2006, the seats of the Albanian parties were not necessary to secure legislative majority for the government in office. Nevertheless, at least one Albanian party has always been present in the cabinet. In the first grand coalition cabinet between 1991 and 1992 there were three ethnic Albanian ministers, while in all other cabinets to follow five (Daskalovski 2004: 56). According to Balalovska (2006: 26) the SDUM-led government between 2002 and 2006 had not five, but six Albanian ministers. After the signing of the Framework Agreement, the presence of Albanians in the government has been further institutionalized. A new practice developed, that is, nominating deputy ministers and state secretaries of different ethnicity from the minister, creating the pattern of Macedonian minister - Albanian deputy, and vice versa. Moreover, while before the agreement Albanians complained that they only received ministries of secondary importance, after the FA the practice of the ethnically mixed teams is also practiced in the more sensitive security-related ministries (Balalovska 2006).

The political division within the Albanian minority in Macedonia does not seem to be based on ideological differences. None of the Albanian parties are affiliated with European parties. Moreover, Friedman (2006) found few differences between the programmatic appeals of the Albanian parties after analyzing their electoral platforms and manifestos. Conversely, the difference between the Albanian parties seems to be rather related to their leaders. Skaric (2005) reports an exit-poll conducted at the 2002 parliamentary elections, which showed that the voters of the Albanian parties (DUI and DPA) mentioned voting for the party because of their perception of the party leader much more frequently than voters of the ethnic Macedonian parties. (27,1% for DUI, 28,0% for DPA, 6,6 for VMRO-DPMNE and 5,8% for SDUM). At the same time the Albanian voters were less attentive to the parties' stances on issues (5,2% and 4,3% as compared to 8,2% and 9,4%). The only issue that was able to differentiate between the voters of DUI and DPA proved to be the implementation of the Framework Agreement: 25% of DUI voters and 13,1% of DPA voters considered this to be the most important issue (Skaric 2006 120-124). The difference is probably due to the fact that it was the DUI that generated the conflict, but also they were the ones to negotiate the solution.

### **Discussion**

A common feature of all the four cases is that the strategies pursued by the parties of the national minorities in the early stages of democratization were mainly dependent on the *positioning of these parties towards the main political camps at the moment of regime change*. Due to the repressions against the minorities during the communist regimes (e.g. Zhivkov's attempts to assimilate the Turks in Bulgaria, or Ceaușescu's repressions against the Hungarians in Romania), the political organizations of the minorities mostly sided with the "democratic forces" at the time of the regime change. The strategies of the national minority parties in the early stages of democratization were thus determined by the balance of forces between the main political competitors. Where the communist successor parties succeeded to remain in power (Romania, Bulgaria), the parties of the minorities had no choice but to stay in opposition, at least initially. Where the "democratic forces" succeeded to form a government, as in Slovakia (Public Against Violence) or Macedonia (VMRO-DPMNE), some minority parties gave their support to the new cabinets.

The early years of democratization were also marked by heavy debates about the adoption of the *new constitutions*, which in most cases pitted the national minorities against the ruling majority coalitions, but sometimes against all majority parties. The adoption of the

new constitutions was marked by harsh antagonism between the national minorities striving to be recognized as constitutive members of the states and for collective rights on the one hand, and the main parties of the ethnic majority on the other, sometimes accompanied by mass demonstrations or even violence. The minorities lost their battles without exception, at least in the short-term. The Romanian constitution of 1991 proclaimed Romania to be a nation-state, without recognizing the Hungarian community as a constitutive element, consequently the DAHR voted against the constitution. Similarly, in Bulgaria the 1991 constitution did not recognize the Turkish minority, moreover, it also banned the formation of parties based on ethnic or religious allegiance. As a reaction all but two of the MRF deputies had abstained in the parliamentary vote for the new constitution in July 1991 (Vassilev 2001: 48). In Macedonia the Albanian minority has been extremely dissatisfied with the new constitution adopted in November 1991, because its preamble declared Macedonia to be ‘the national state of the Macedonian people, providing for the full equality of citizens and permanent coexistence of the Macedonian people with Albanians, Turks, Roma, and other nationalities’. This was seen as a demotion from the status of constitutive nation granted in the previous socialist constitution, which defined Macedonia to be a nation of ‘the Macedonian people and the Albanian and Turkish minorities’. The PDP and the NDP boycotted the parliamentary session that promulgated the new constitution, and claimed later that it lacked legitimacy because of the absence of the ethnic Albanian deputies from the room (Daskalovski 2004: 56). In Slovakia the developments have been similar after the 1992 elections, when Vladimír Mečiar’s coalition dominated by nationalist Slovak parties assumed power. Consequently the members of the two Hungarian ethnic parties represented in parliament (Coexistence and HCMD) left the room as a sign of protest against the fact that none of their proposals have been incorporated, and that the voting has not been secret but by raising hands (Orosz-Popély 2006: 385).

The battle about the definition of the nation, conducted in an atmosphere of ethnic antagonism and accompanied by fierce attacks from the nationalist movements of the majority restricted the strategies available for the parties representing the national minorities, and compelled them to adopt a tribune strategy. Both the MRF and the DAHR declined early invitations to join the government (Bakk 1999), the PDP in Macedonia is an interesting exception, though its actual contribution to governance remains questionable. For how long they were doomed to pursue this strategy depended on the further development of the political opportunity structure. In Romania the so-called “Red Quadrangle” has been formed after the second elections, the Democratic National Salvation Front governed with three nationalist

parties, the Party for the National Unity of Romanians, the Greater Romania Party and the Socialist Workers' Party. In Slovakia Meciar's nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia formed a coalition with the ultra-nationalist Slovak National Party. This meant that the ethnic issue remained one of the most salient issues, or even mounted to a secondary dimension of the party competition. The parties of the minorities were facing very much hostility from the parties in power, but sometimes also from the opposition. The fact that in this period the minorities were trying to obtain some sort of self-government offered an excellent opportunity to the nationalist parties of the majority to accuse them of being disloyal or anti-system, consequently the more moderate parties of the majority also perceived it as risky to try to collaborate with the ethnic parties.

The isolation of the ethnic parties could only be broken by "moderating" the discourse, which meant renouncing to some of the most important demands. However, this risked losing the support of the more radical members of the minority, and possible splits within the parties that were pretty much heterogeneous. Indeed, several party splits have occurred exactly in this period when the ethnic parties were facing a serious dilemma about what strategy to adopt. This is the moment when the radical *Turkish Democratic Party* appeared, but also the *Party of Democratic Prosperity* suffered a split in 1994. However, all of the major ethnic parties decided eventually to pursue a governmental strategy. Furthermore, none of them except the MRF decided to withdraw its support from a cabinet (but MRF was not actually in government, but only supported it from the parliament between 1991-1992). Both the DAHR in Romania and the PHC in Slovakia threatened to leave the coalition because of the resistance of their partners against some central issues of their ethnic agenda (like the creation of a Hungarian language public university in Romania or of a county with Hungarian majority population in Slovakia). Yet eventually they changed their mind, and stayed. This decision also fuelled criticism from rivals within the ethnic group and in Slovakia it even coincided with the launching of a new party (the *Hungarian Federalist Party*), but it certainly contributed to the split in Romania too, though this occurred somewhat later, in 2003.

But the room for maneuver of ethnic parties in government is constrained not only by the reactions of the more radical groups from the minority, but also by other factors. For instance, going back to opposition may very well lead to isolation, especially if the opposition is composed of those parties that were the most important adversaries when in government (Toró 1999, Hamberger 2004). Furthermore, leaving the coalition because of the inability to reach policy outcomes favorable only for the minority may lead to being stigmatized as not caring about the interests of the country/nation but rather pursuing the particularistic goals of

the minority (e.g. a group of Slovak intellectuals urged the PHC in an open letter in 2001 to stay in the coalition, quoted in Hamberger 2004)

The splinters and attempts to create alternative ethnic organizations can be classified into two main categories. The first and least successful proved to be those cases when some of the major parties of the dominant nation attempted to penetrate the minority groups by aiding the creation of new minority organizations, led by people belonging to the minority but loyal to the majority elites. The cases discussed above from Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria make it evident that there will always be minority leaders dissatisfied or in conflict with the leadership of the main ethnic organization whose loyalty can be bought by offering them office or other direct benefits. None of these alternative ethnic parties has put forward more radical demands than the main minority organization, on the contrary, they even tried to picture the hegemonic ethnic party as being too radical.

The second category of alternative ethnic organizations can be interpreted in terms of a divide within the minority regarding the strategy to follow or the nature of the demands to put forward. This does not exclude that some actors of the majority will not try to use profit of these types of divides within the minority, as it happened in Romania in the past few years when president Bănescu regularly met with the leaders of the Hungarian Civic Party, in order to signal that he recognizes them as legitimate representatives of the Hungarian community. However, in the case of these organizations there is a claim that the main ethnic party is not radical enough or that it has made too many compromises in order to secure office, which is absent in the first category, or even if it is present, it is obvious that it is not genuine. These alternative ethnic parties seem to be more successful than the previous category, though their success will depend a lot on the institutional configuration. The Hungarian Federalist Party did not succeed to become institutionalized, while the Hungarian Civic Party in Romania seems to lose ground after a more promising start. In Macedonia the Party of Democratic Prosperity of Albanians was more successful, eventually becoming stronger than the party it split from, the Party for Democratic Prosperity.

Finally, the Democratic Union for Integration in Macedonia is a different case. While at the moment of its appearance it was without doubt more radical than the DPA which has been part of the government, the DUI is unique in the sense that it did not refrain from adopting an anti-system strategy and using of violence, while it was also able to switch back very flexibly to a strategy of cooperation and even assume governmental office later. Out of

the discussed cases the DUI is the most successful newcomer party, and the only one to be able to dislocate the ethnic party that has been the strongest before its appearance.

Despite giving ammunition for challengers and more radical rivals within the ethnic minority, governmental participation does not unequivocally pose the perils described by de Winter (1998, 2006) and Argelaguet (2003). The discussed cases provide evidence both for and against this claim. The *Party of the Hungarian Coalition* improved its electoral performance both in 2002 and 2006, while the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* leaped from 7,45% to 12,81% after four years in government between 2001 and 2005. Similarly, the DUI in Macedonia improved its result in 2006 as compared to 2002, and the *Democratic Party of Albanians* also scored better in 2008 than in 2006.

However, in 1992 the Hungarian Civic Party in Slovakia failed to enter the parliament after participating in government, while its more assertive rivals did. In Macedonia the *Party of Democratic Prosperity* polled much worse in 1994 than in 1990, while more than half of the support of the *Democratic Party of Albanians* has been transferred to the DUI in 2002 after the civil war and the Ohrid Framework Agreement. However, this last case should rather be treated as the impact of a critical event rather than the negative effect of incumbency.

The success of newcomer ethnic challenger parties is largely dependent on the conditions of entry into the political arena. The electoral systems in all four countries but Macedonia became gradually more and more restrictive. In Romania a 3% threshold has been introduced for political parties in 1992, and raised to 5% in 2000. Given that the percentage of the Hungarian population has been 7,1% in 1991 and dropped to 6,6% in 2002, even a 3% threshold represented a deterring element. Moreover, the conditions for registering new parties has been made more restrictive in 1996, parties being required to have at least 10.000 members in 16 counties (Bakk 1999). In 2004 an even more restrictive piece of legislation has been passed regarding the participation at the elections of those national minorities' organizations that were not represented in the parliament. The new law required a number of signatures equal with 15% of the persons who declared themselves as belonging to the minority at the previous census. Moreover, if this 15% is higher than 25.000 people, then 25.000 signatures are required from at least 15 counties and Bucharest, but no less than 300 signatures from each county. This amendment has been supported in the parliament also by the DAHR, as the requirement of 25.000 signatures can only refer to the two large minorities,

the Hungarians and the Roma.<sup>4</sup> However, while the DAHR voted this amendment, in the process of the electoral reform from 2008 they succeeded to insert a safeguard for maintaining representation even in case the 5% threshold would not be reached. As the new electoral law from 2008 introduced single-member districts<sup>5</sup>, an alternative threshold has also been created: a party that failed to reach 5% of the vote can become represented if its candidates finish on the first place in three senatorial and six deputy constituencies simultaneously. As the major parties do not need such a provision, and the support of the small Romanian parties is not sufficiently concentrated geographically as to enable them to fulfill this requirement, the only party that could be advantaged by such a threshold is the DAHR. It is obvious that the main Hungarian party in Romania is so deeply entrenched in the Romanian party cartel (see Katz and Mair 1995), that it is able and willing to resort to institutional engineering in order to protect its hegemonic position within the minority.

The case of the MRF in Bulgaria is somehow similar. While at the beginning it suffered itself from the existence of a ban on ethnically based parties in the constitution, this article turned into a safeguard of the MRF by disabling the more radical rival Turkish organizations from entering the competition.

The evolution of the electoral system in Slovakia has been similar to the one from Romania, but it exerted an even stronger impact on the minorities, and it provided even stronger incentives for coordination, finally pushing the Hungarian parties to merge. Although the very restrictive thresholds set in 1998 have been abolished by the next cabinet, the threshold of 4% remains sufficiently high in order to make party splinters within the Hungarian minority very costly.

In Macedonia on the other hand the costs of entry have been low since 1990. While at the first two elections a two-round runoff absolute majority system has been employed in single-member districts, this did not hurt the Albanian minority because of its high territorial concentration. While I have no access to demographic data broken down according to the electoral constituencies that have been in place at the first three elections, according to the new administrative division of the country 65,71% of the Albanians live in administrative units where their share is above 50%.<sup>6</sup> Although before the Framework Agreement the

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<sup>4</sup> Law 67 from 2004. See also the opinion of the Venice Commission on the law at [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2004/CDL-AD\(2004\)040-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2004/CDL-AD(2004)040-e.asp)

<sup>5</sup> However strange this may sound, this did not mean that the system changed from PR to a majoritarian or even to a mixed system. It only meant that the closed party lists were removed, instead the final allocation of the seats depends on the performance of the candidates in the single-member districts. Law 35 from 2008.

<sup>6</sup> State Statistical Office of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
[http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/kniga\\_13.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/kniga_13.pdf)

Albanians were disadvantaged by the existence of considerable malapportionment, the Albanian majority SMDs being on average 25% larger than the Macedonian majority ones (Balalovska 2006), the territorial concentration of the community meant that a splinter party would not endanger the representation of the ethnic group by challenging the already existing parties. Since the signing of the Ohrid Agreement Macedonia changed to a PR electoral system. But the costs of entry remained low, as the system does not have any threshold.

Another important difference between Macedonia and the rest of the explored cases lies in the structural characteristics of the ethnic groups. The territorial concentration of the groups has already been discussed for Macedonia. In the other three countries the national minorities are more dispersed. Though the Minorities at Risk dataset codes the Hungarians in both Romania and Slovakia as having the highest degree of territorial concentration, just like the Albanians in Macedonia (3, concentrated in a single region), and the Turks in Bulgaria in the second category (majority in one region, others dispersed), in reality all three groups are more dispersed than the Albanians in Macedonia. Only 13,54% of the Turks in Bulgaria live in regions where they constitute more than 60% of the population, and 23,18% in administrative units where they are above 40%. In Slovakia 32,4% of the Hungarians live in administrative units (*okres*) where they constitute more than 70% of the population, and another 31,96% in units where their weight is between 30 and 45%. In Romania 46,69% of the Hungarians live in the Szekler region in a compact bloc, the rest are rather dispersed.<sup>7</sup> Among these three countries it is exactly in Romania, where the largest concentrated bloc of Hungarians can be found, that the most successful alternative ethnic organization emerged (discounting the Albanian examples). The proportion of the minorities is also different in the case of Macedonia. Ethnic Albanians counted for 23% of the population in 1994 and 25% in 2002, while the rest of the minorities are all below 10% of the population.

### **Conclusions and further directions for research**

While the exploration of these four cases yielded some useful insights about the political dynamics that may go on within national minorities, it is also obvious that the potential relationships should be tested in a more systematic way.

The survey of national minority political parties conducted in this paper revealed that most of the splinters and alternative ethnic organizations failed to become relevant parties. It is clear that irrelevant splinters will always occur, but most of the time these seem motivated

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<sup>7</sup> Based on data from the national statistics offices. The figures are from 2001 for Bulgaria and Slovakia and from 2002 for Romania.

rather by personal conflicts, or conflicts over office rather than different visions about the problems of the minority (It seems that the assumption that all leaders are office-seekers is more appropriate than starting with the assumption that the elites of the minorities are primarily policy seeking).

Consequently the research question could be turned around. Given the fact that there have been numerous attempts to create rival organizations for the main ethnic parties in many countries (also Lithuania, Albania, South-Tyrol etc. beside the ones explored here), and most of them failed, the question rather becomes the following: *under what conditions can an alternative ethnic organization be successful?* And the other side of the story: *why is it that most of these attempts were not successful, how can the hegemonic organizations maintain their support and remain the most stable actors in the party systems in which they activate?*

Furthermore, other variables should also be paid more attention. Most importantly the economy, the policy achievements related to the ethnic/regionalist agenda, and the role of the kin-states should be considered somehow. Also, all the cases considered here share the common characteristic of lacking of a regional level of government with considerable powers (perhaps Slovakia could be the exception). The existence of regional governments at first sight seems to encourage political pluralism within the minority (Catalonia, Basque Country, South Tyrol), but this is not an iron law either (not true in Scotland or Wales).

I also don't want to drop the more ambitious project of carrying out a medium-N (or rather an "as-large-as-possible-N") analysis of the determinants of the distribution of support between the ethnic parties standing for a particular minority. This would require first of all testing the incumbency effect on ethnic parties on as many cases as possible, including also participation in regional governments, because the instances of participation in national governments are too few. Such a project requires:

- collecting comprehensive data on government participation, including the precise functions assumed by minority parties (sounds easy but in reality pretty difficult to get)
- incorporating economic data, but somehow differentiating between the ethnic group represented and the rest of the population. It might easily happen that the economic conditions of the minority are way different from those of the population at large (due to their geographic distribution, or to other factors as increased mobility potential towards their kin-state, as in the case of the Greeks in Albania). So, at least economic

indicators broken down to a meaningfully low regional level would be needed. (Not impossible, but takes time).

- operationalizing the developments related to the ethno-regionalist agenda (e.g. passing legislation benefic to the minority, successful decentralization, devolution or increased autonomy etc.). (Again not impossible, but requires a bit of creativity).

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