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The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) in the Government of Romania from 1996 to 2000

It is an unrewarding undertaking for analysts to evaluate the activities of a political party and its participation in a coalition government. The DAHR, which since 1989 has undertaken the interest representation of ethnic Hungarians living in Romania, accepted a role in the coalition government formed by the Democratic Convention of Romania¹ between December 1996 and November 2000. In evaluating any political activity, the question of (the analyst's) *viewpoint* is inevitably raised and since the authors regard scientific objectivity a fundamental requirement, they consider it their main task to set up a system of criteria with the endeavour of remaining free from taking political stands as far as it is possible. Here we cannot survey the history of the relevant events.² Due to the proximity of events and the lack of the relevant documents, we were in no position to explore work-related debates concerning governmental activities within the governing coalition and within the DAHR itself.³ The support and popularity of a political party represent a relevant measure in judging the party's success. The DAHR is, however, an ethnic party whose voters

1 Convenția Democrată din România

2 Miklós Bakk: "1989–1999: az RMDSZ első tíz éve" (*The first ten years of the DAHR*). In Bodó, Barna (ed.): *Romániai Magyar Évkönyv 2000*, Temesvár, Kolozsvár: Szórvány Alapítvány-Polis Könyvkiadó, 2000, 19–32.; "Kronológia" (*Cronology*). In *Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség 1989–1999*, Kolozsvár, 2000.

3 In our future research, in line with a unified system of perspectives, we aim to interview 120 persons who participated in the work of the government and examine the debates of the Council of Representatives. This could provide a good basis for more detailed analysis.

are recruited from the Hungarian cultural-political community of Romania. Therefore, Hungarian voters do not cast their ballots only in accordance with their political and economic preferences, but also on the basis of their ethnic/national status.

The problems of approach to the topic under investigation are the following:

a) What can be the basis of such an evaluation? b) Who is making the evaluation? c) Is it a professional or a political issue to evaluate the activities of a political party (in a coalition government)?

In Romania the major sources of information about safeguarding the interests of the Hungarian minority are the reports of the DAHR. If we simplify the accounts of the press and the political declarations, we can see two kinds of evaluation: one being the official evaluation of the DAHR, the other being the opinion of the internal opposition of the DAHR.⁴ These are of political rather than of professional nature. There are, furthermore, analyses carried out by professionals but only in negligible number.⁵ Although the majority of analyses are political in nature, they deal with all the key issues. However, for the true analyst, political evaluations owing to their very nature, cannot serve as a basis.

Methodologically we can use various approaches: a) the experiences of the parliamentary and municipal elections, b) the findings of opinion polls, c) the comparison of the programmes of the DAHR and the government with the results achieved, d) the effect of the role in the coalition government on the development of social and political relationships, e) the effects on the development of the Romanian political system towards consocial structures and on the nation-building projects of the Hungarian minority.

4 *Mérlegen: Az RMDSZ a koalícióban (Making a balance: The DAHR in the coalition), 1996–2000.* RMDSZ, 2000; and. Toró, Tibor T.: “Az RMDSZ koalíciós szerepvállalása: zsákutca vagy kiút egy hatékonyabb politikai érdekképviselés felé?” (*The role of the DAHR in the coalition: a dead-end or a way-out towards more efficient political interest representation?*). *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1998, No. 1., 222–251, and answers published: same publication 1998, No. 2., 3–141.; Borbély, Zsolt Attila: “Markónak mennie kell” (*Markó must go*). *Erdélyi Napló*, 1999, No. 17.

5 Bíró, Zoltán A.: “A kormánybalépés egy éve a magyar-magyar reláció szemszögéből” (*The first year after entering the government from the point of view of Hungarian-Hungarian relations*). In Bakk, Miklós–Székely, István–Toró T., Tibor (eds.): *Útközben: pillanatképek az erdélyi magyar politika reformjáról (On the way: Snapshots of the reform of Hungarian politics in Transylvania)*. Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 1999, 124–137.

The political environment in Romania

Following the events of 1989, a parliamentary democracy based on a multi-party system has slowly developed in Romania. In this study we do not deal with the evaluation of Romanian democracy. Although we cannot regard Romania as a substantial democracy (R. Dahl), beyond doubt we can consider it a formal or procedural democracy (J. A. Schumpeter). In the period from 1990 to 1996 we can speak of the prevailing politics of the Party of Social Democracy in Romania⁶ or its legal predecessors. This period was characterized by slow reform and a consolidation of the political system. The DAHR participated in Romanian political life as an opposition party, while also working on the development of a Hungarian system of institutions and moving towards internal pluralism. The parties in power up to 1996 showed little willingness to satisfy Hungarian demands and anti-Hungarian and anti-DAHR rhetoric were characteristic features of political discourse.

After November 1996 the mere fact of the DAHR's participation in the Romanian government was of great importance. With this, the party became acceptable as a political partner and at the same time it created a precedent. Cooperation between the parties in power and the DAHR became a reality when the Romanian political establishment needed a kind of legitimation abroad.

In this period, the representatives of the DAHR in the legislation tried to support those drafts of bills which pointed towards reforms and their activities were also focused on protecting the interests of Hungarians living in Romania. With developing a particular internal organisation (Council of Representatives, Executive Presidency, Council of Mediation) and with the institutionalisation of platforms, the DAHR shaped its internal structure and a movement gradually became a political party and started to behave accordingly.

The organisation of social life (and in many respects, the operation of its institutions) was gradually taken over by the DAHR or by various "ethno-civilian" organisations supported by funds controlled by the DAHR. The organisation of internal elections, the pluralisation of the political life of Hungarians through the model of local government, as approved of by the DAHR congress at Brassó⁷, were never realised and internal political discussion fell into the background.

6 Partidul Democrației Sociale din România

7 15–17 January 1993.

No evaluations have been made on the activities of the previous government yet, but we can utilise the analyses published in various professional periodicals. When the coalition led by the Democratic Convention took over government in 1996, it promised to carry out the long overdue political and economic reforms needed since 1990. The first steps justified expectations and the popularity of the coalition increased, but when the Ciorbea government stopped short facing trade union demands (in March 1997), the antagonisms within the coalition became increasingly evident and the whole process of reform came to a standstill. The process of reform, although partially under foreign pressure, accelerated again during the time of the government led by Mugur Isărescu (December 1999), nevertheless the coalition had little time left for the results to show. Thus, the fall of the coalition was practically inevitable, which fact was clearly foreshadowed by the data of opinion polls and the results of municipal elections in 2000. According to Dan Pavel, the unity of the coalition was held together by the task of carrying out the reforms.⁸ He claims that this is the only possible argument for the cooperation of three parties (Democratic Convention of Romania, Democrat Party and DAHR) so significantly differing in ideology, tradition and legitimacy. We may add that this was the only possible coalition which could prevent the previous governing parties from returning. In the same article Dan Pavel explains that the government's failure to carry out the reforms was due to the fact that the parties cared much less for the reforms than for the reinforcement of their own economic positions. The parties in the government paid more attention to their particular interests. In his opinion, one of the major reasons for the disfunctionality of the coalition was the lack of contractual regulation between the parties of the coalition. For each new emerging problem new rules had to be worked out, a process in which the parties became fully absorbed. The analyst, Dan Pavel, himself is also an intellectual who supported the coalition in principle, but looked on the functioning and effectiveness of the coalition with a critical eye. Good intentions and an (at least verbal) commitment to reforms did not lead to the building of institutions, to the making of decisions within the coalition and to the implementation of reforms. The coalition functioned effectively only in crisis situations, which in itself was not sufficient for carrying out the reforms. Therefore, in retrospect, it seems that it was inevitable for the coalition to lose the elections, and

⁸ Pavel, Dan: "Performanța Coaliției? Rămînera împreună (1)". *Sfîra Politicii*, 1998, No. 65.

we may venture the opinion that this did not happen because of the loss of its popularity due to tribulations entailed by the reforms.

From the point of view of our study, it is interesting that in the second part of his analysis Dan Pavel points out that promises made to the DAHR were not kept, either in the letter or in the spirit of the agreement.⁹ Later he mentions as a shortcoming of the DAHR that while pursuing a coherent policy to achieve its own goals, the DAHR did not notice the decline of the coalition's popularity and was not sufficiently aware of the fact that it could expect support only from the then coalition in any issue concerning the Hungarian minority in Romania. Nevertheless, in evaluating the government's activity in the year 1999, the same author points out that the DAHR was the most stable part of the coalition, which always voted according to the coalition agreements and received practically nothing in return from its coalition partners.¹⁰

After this short introduction we can start the actual analysis, which we will begin with an examination of the criteria of interpretation.

Election performance – as a possible criterion of evaluation

As far as the success of the activities of a party is concerned, the number of votes for the party and partially the data of opinion polls can be relevant. In the following sections we are going to examine the results of the municipal and general elections in 2000 and the data of opinion polls conducted in the following year. One reason why this must be done is because politicians like to use these data to support their arguments in their “coalition evaluations”.¹¹

Municipal elections 2000

In the case of an ethnic party, when examining its election results, the questions must be raised in a subtle manner. Authors in the relevant professional literature agree that the voters of an ethnic party belong almost exclu-

9 Pavel, Dan: “Performanța Coaliției? Rămînerea împreună (2)”. *Sfera Politicii*, 1999, No. 66.

10 Pavel, Dan: “De ce nu s- predat coaliția?”. *Sfera Politicii*, 2000, No. 78.

11 Előd Kincses: “Az RMDSZ választási szereplése a szavazatok tükrében” (*The election performance of the DAHR in terms of votes*). *Krónika*, 30 December 2000.

sively to that ethnic/national group and there is a very low cross-voting ratio.¹² For Hungarian voters there is a greater likelihood of staying away from the ballot box than of voting for another party. The basis of reference – based on the data of population census – is the number of Hungarians in Romania and from this figure it is possible to approximate the number of potential Hungarian voters. Another basis of reference is the ratio of DAHR voters in the previous election against which we can measure new election results. In the case of a government coalition, however, we can only have hypotheses about the effect of an earlier participation in the government on the present results of a certain party.

As has already been mentioned, the measure of success or failure of a political party is its performance in the elections. An ethnic party, however, can very rarely obtain votes from outside its own ethnic group. Its election campaign is essentially focused on convincing as many members of its own national group as possible to go and cast their ballots. Therefore, the party's performance in the elections cannot be a primary criterion of evaluation.

The government coalition consisting of the Democratic Convention of Romania, the Democrat Party¹³ and the DAHR, which replaced the government led by the Party of Social Democracy in Romania, did not rise up to expectations. (After the initial gathering of momentum, the government failed to implement the 40-article, 200-day programme called the "Contract with Romania".¹⁴) The government failed to carry out the reform of institutions, to curb inflation and had no power to change the structure of the economy.

As compared to its promises, the government under-performed, though it remains an open question as to what extent these promises could have been performed even under optimum circumstances. A drastic programme of reforms would have also turned the population against the government.

Let us examine first the results of the municipal elections in 2000.¹⁵

12 Donald L. Horowitz: *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.

13 Partidul Democrat

14 Dan Oprescu: "Care Contract? Care Românie?" *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 51.

15 Miklós Bakk – István Székely: "Az RMDSZ és az önkormányzati választások" (*The DAHR and the local elections*). *Magyar Kisebbség*, 2000, No. 3, 111.

Number of votes on the county list of candidates on 4 June 2000.

<i>Party</i>	<i>Number of votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Party of Social Democracy in Romania	2,200,806	27.26%
Democrat Party	803,689	9.95%
Democratic Convention	605,541	7.50%
Alliance for Romania ¹⁶	596,846	7.39%
National Liberal Party ¹⁷	563,255	6.98%
Great Romania Party ¹⁸	533,854	6.61%
DAHR	512,413	6.35%

We can see that the governing parties in the county council elections (relevant from our point of view) collected slightly over 30 % of the votes which is roughly half the votes received in the general election in 1996. That is to say that in the 2000 municipal elections the governing parties performed far below their results in the 1996 municipal and general elections. The DAHR was the only party which received roughly the same number of votes as in the previous municipal and parliamentary elections. Its voters did not punish the DAHR. From these results we can conclude that as long as the DAHR does not commit some terrible mistake, Hungarians in Romania will continue to vote for it. We may venture the conclusion that the results achieved by the DAHR did not depend on the party's performance in the government. Consequently, these results cannot serve as an evaluation criterion.

The number of DAHR mandates received in the municipal elections¹⁹ (in parentheses: the number of representatives who won on a joint list with other parties)

<i>Officials</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2000</i>
Representatives of local authorities	2616+(147)	2445+(1)	2451
Mayors	131+(11)	139	148
Representatives of county authorities	121+(23)	133	135

¹⁶ Alianța pentru România

¹⁷ Partidul Național Liberal

¹⁸ Partidul România Mare

¹⁹ Bakk – Székely, op. cit., 112.

This table reveals that the number of mandates obtained by the DAHR in local elections is relatively stable. Differences were due to the occasional joint nomination of candidates with other parties, the amendment of the election law and the change in the number of the active voters. This slight change cannot be attributed to the role of the DAHR in the coalition government. All we want to point out is that *even the local elections show no sign of decline in the DAHR's popularity among voters due to its participation in the government coalition.* In addition to representatives who obtained their mandates from the DAHR list, Hungarian representatives and mayors also received mandates as independent candidates, especially in the 1996 and 2000 municipal elections.

Parliamentary and presidential elections in November 2000

The parliamentary and presidential elections justified the trend forecast by the data of opinion polls and the results of municipal elections. The shift of power within the post-communist political group and the forging ahead of the Great Romania Party and its leader are of course surprises, but are of secondary importance from the point of view of our study.

Election results of the DAHR in 1996 and 2000:²⁰

	1996		2000	
	Number	%	Number	%
House of Representatives	812,628	6.64	736,863	6.8
Senate	837,760	6.82	751,310	6.9

Compared to the earlier elections, in 2000 the DAHR received less votes, but due to the lower election turnout and the amendment of electoral law, scored better percentage-wise and as a consequence obtained more seats in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. While the country-wide turnout, as compared to the 1996 elections, was 20% lower and the number of those who voted for the DAHR went down by almost 70,000, their ratio decreased only by 10%.

As compared to the other coalition parties, the DAHR succeeded in keeping its supporters. Unambiguously, the explanation lies in the fact of eth-

20 <http://www.kappa.ro/guv/bec/bec96.html/>; WWW.RMDSZ.RO

nicity-driven voting and not in an improved performance of the party. We may also add that the Hungarian voters do not hold the DAHR responsible for the economic problems of the country, because in their interpretation the DAHR primarily deals with issues related to the Hungarian minority. We might obtain a subtler picture, if we examined the election results county by county, but this picture would show the situation in local politics rather than the general judgement about the activities of the DAHR as a party in the government.

The election results can be considered as signals that can contribute to judging the DAHR, but cannot be used as an evaluation criterion. They can be at most relevant to the Romanian coalition partners. The Romanian voters punished the governing parties with their votes, but this did not happen in the case of the DAHR and the Hungarian voters.

Opinion poll data – as a possible criterion of evaluation

We must also be very careful with the data of opinion polls. We can use the data of the Barometer Opinion Poll,²¹ but these data are not representative for the Hungarian minority. Although Hungarians appear in the sample proportionally to their number in the country, we cannot be sure at all that they represent a true cross-section of the Hungarian minority. Research projects which explicitly examine the Hungarian minority in Romania either exclusively or with the increase of the Hungarian sample give rise to problems. *Today there exists no such database from which a professionally sound sample could be compiled.* Since the last population census there have been social changes which have redrawn the map of the Hungarian community in Romania.²²

According to a survey of the CCRIT²³ conducted in the spring of 2000 in which only Hungarians were questioned, 80.6% were of the opinion that the governmental activities of the DAHR had been characterised by concrete results and only 5.3% thought that nothing had been implemented from the tasks undertaken.

21 *Barometrul Opiniei Publice* – Opinion poll results published quarterly in Romania

22 Here we primarily refer to internal migration, emigration and significant changes in the stratification of society.

23 Centrul pentru Cercetări a Relațiilor Interetnice din Transilvania (*Research Centre for Inter-ethnic Relations in Transylvania*)

The political effectiveness of the DAHR was judged as follows:²⁴

	<i>Tends to agree (%)</i>	<i>Tends to disagree (%)</i>
So far the DAHR has pursued a good policy	75.2	17.5
Though slowly, the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania can be enforced	87.8	6.9
The leaders of the DAHR should try to participate in future governments, because this is the only way for them to do anything efficiently for the Hungarian minority	82.6	9.9
DAHR politicians have often succeeded in enforcing the interests of the Hungarian minority	68.3	22
DAHR politicians have only made promises but done very little for the Hungarian minority	38.1	54.2

The results of the survey allow us to conclude that the Hungarian population of Romania tends to judge the DAHR's participation in the government coalition positively. On the basis of this, we can draw the conclusion that the results of the municipal and parliamentary elections are almost of no use and the data of opinion polls are of limited use when setting up evaluation criteria for the DAHR's role in the government coalition.

Now we can devote our attention to an analysis based on our own system of criteria.

Raising questions interpreting the effect of political decisions – as a criterion of evaluation

It is a commonplace that the participants in the public life of Hungarians in Romania and, in general, the members of the Hungarian minority in Romania have many different perspectives about the future, and place emphasis on different political priorities. For the evaluation of the DAHR's role in government role we considered the following aspects of importance from the material examined: the relations between ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians, the development of inter-ethnic coexistence; the development of relations between Romania and Hungary and within this context the Euro-At-

²⁴ *Romániai magyarok 2000*. CCRIT, March 2000, 33.

lantic integration of Romania; the democratisation and stability of the Romanian political system. In addition to these issues, a central issue concerning the Hungarian minority in Romania and the DAHR is the effect of its governmental role on democracy within the DAHR as well as on the Hungarian society in Romania and on the preservation of Hungarian identity. In close connection with this are the following aspects: a) Has the support of the DAHR as a party become stronger or weaker? (Or is there any correlation between the party's participation in the government coalition and its support?) b) Have the cleavages within the DAHR become deeper or have they become less pronounced? Since there is no absolute evaluation criterion, we can set out from two bases of reference. One is constituted by *the goals identified in the programme of the DAHR*, and the other by *the underlying goals of the programme often not verbalised in politics*. The latter can be summarised as creating and operating on an ethnic basis a Hungarian society in Romania parallel with the Romanian society; this may be called: the institutionalisation process of the Hungarian minority in Romania. This would incorporate human and minority rights, some form of autonomy and an autonomous system of institutions with elected ethnic Hungarians in leading positions.

DAHR, the protagonist

One of the starting points of our analysis is the fact that the DAHR is *a party organised on an ethnic basis*. Its voters are almost exclusively ethnic Hungarians living in Romania and in its programme it represents the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania. As is characteristic of any ethnic party, the DAHR also fulfils *a double function*. On the one hand, *as a political party*, it participates in the Romanian political life, on the other hand, it *carries out tasks of organising the Hungarian society*. In the focus of the programme and the political activities of such parties stands the representation of the interests and values of the relevant national/ethnic group/community. Like other parties, the DAHR also behaves as a party and its leaders also have their own particular interests, which do not always coincide with the interests of the group represented.

On the basis of the programme of the DAHR and the activities of its representatives in parliament, we can state that the party supported decentralisation, the development of a functioning economy and the Euro-Atlantic integration of Romania. In this sense, *from an external viewpoint*, we can classify

the party as one of the modern liberal parties.²⁵ According to some Romanian analysts, the DAHR has no programme for the whole of Romania.²⁶ This is an erroneous statement, because the DAHR has indeed developed a programme, in which it has presented its views on the desirable social transformation of Romania, although it is true that it detailed them in such a way that they should be advantageous to the Hungarian minority in Romania.

In the DAHR's view, *accession to the European Union and NATO* can create a framework for enforcing the individual and/or collective rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. *Through decentralisation*, units with their own authority can be created in which the Hungarians can (also) participate to a greater degree in the decision making process concerning primarily their own political, cultural and economic issues. At the same time a (Hungarian) system of institutions can be developed in which Hungarian cultural reproduction can be implemented.

In general, the DAHR as a *minority party has a double priority at macro level*: a) the creation of smaller, more autonomous units characteristic of a decentralised public administration, of autonomy and of federalism, b) the creation of an autonomous system of institutions comprising the institutes of education (first of all an autonomous Hungarian university) and different professional organisations and associations.

These together signify the creation of a Hungarian parallel society, the institutionalisation of the Hungarian society in Romania.

The DAHR as a social organisation makes efforts to organise the civilian (non-governmental) sphere (or what is regarded as such) of the Hungarian community in Romania. To this end it strengthens various organisations and institutions not purely without the intention of keeping or perhaps expanding its voting base.

Due to the above-mentioned features, there will be overlaps in our study in the evaluation of the *DAHR* and the *participation of the DAHR in the government coalition*.

Since its foundation, the DAHR has undertaken the political representation of the entire Hungarian minority in Romania, but it has been constantly debated from the beginning what and how should the DAHR represent. In-

25 If we consider the part of the programme which refers to its own society, we can identify a consolidated and conservative value system.

26 Vladimir Pasti: *România în tranziție: căderea în viitor*. București: Nemira, 1995.

ternal disputes have stemmed from the differing views on the tasks and strategy of the DAHR. These disputes have always been present in the history of the DAHR to date and we must be careful not to base our analysis on the points of view of any of these schools of thought.

The origin of the problem: entering the government

As regards accepting a role in the government, two events must be highlighted. The most important was the urgent conclusion of the Romanian-Hungarian basic agreement in September 1996. The fact that the agreement was signed by the Iliescu and the Horn governments meant that during the Romanian election campaign nationalistic rhetoric fell into the background, on the one hand, and that it was a signal from the government of Hungary that these matters would be decided by the governments of the two countries, on the other. After signing the agreement and before the 1997 NATO summit in Madrid, Romania could not afford a campaign with nationalist rhetoric. It is difficult for outsiders to find the reasons (considerations and interests) on the basis of which the DAHR accepted its role in the government, but the aforementioned definitely made a contribution to it.

The other factor was the nomination of the DAHR's own candidate for the position of head of state. Sándor Balázs directly states that "the DAHR then decided on a possible participation in the coalition when it nominated a candidate for presidency".²⁷ He and Tibor T. Toró share the opinion that during the campaign the "more moderate" rhetoric of György Frunda, which at least in a "radical" sense left the programme of autonomy in the background, made the Hungarians and the DAHR acceptable as a coalition partner in the eyes of the Romanian parties, and at the same time suggested this same message to the Hungarian voters as well.²⁸

The Democratic Convention and the Democrat Party together had a 53% majority of seats in the parliament and even with the DAHR they would not have reached a two-thirds majority. We can only assume what the reasons were *why the DAHR was also co-opted into the government*. There had

27 Sándor Balázs: "A hatalomban vagy a hatalomból" (*In power or out of power*). *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1998, No. 2., 6.

28 Tibor Toró T.: "Az RMDSZ koalíciós szerepvállalása: zsákutca vagy kiút egy hatékonyabb politikai érdekképviselet felé?" (*The role of the DAHR in the coalition: a dead-end or a way-out towards more efficient political interest-representation*). *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1998, No. 1., 224.

been ample evidence before that in Romanian political life a majority with a 3% margin was very little. On the other hand, in the eyes of the West, the participation of the DAHR in the government would cast a favourable light on Romania, which, as politicians assumed, would have also been able to tip the balance in favour of Romania at the NATO summit in July 1997. As already mentioned, it was not a negligible fact that the campaign of the DAHR and György Frunda suggested the image of a reliable political party, which was not demanding too much. We may add that because of political polarisation the chance of including any other party in the coalition was very slim. From this viewpoint the DAHR might have seemed to be the “cheapest” solution.

In retrospect, it is very difficult to decide if DAHR participation in the government contributed to the poor popularity and the failure in the election of the government coalition and if it did, then to what extent. In our assumption, this aspect played no significant role. The loss of popularity was mainly attributable to the permanent dysfunctionality of the governmental activities due to the internal conflicts of the coalition and the resulting poor performance of the economy. In this, naturally, the DAHR also had its own share, but it is evident – without making any attempt to absolve the DAHR from responsibility – that it had very little influence on economic processes. From the viewpoint of Hungarian voters, who were mainly ethnic voters, economic failure did not turn many voters away from the DAHR. We can justly assume that those Hungarians who did not vote in the elections of 2000 or did not vote for the DAHR, were more influenced by internal conflicts in the DAHR or local disputes rather than by the DAHR’s role in the government coalition.

From different declarations and manifestations it turned out that in the interest of and during the participation in the coalition the DAHR had to abandon certain demands.

These demands primarily referred to the concept of autonomy and to the model of local government. It seems to be likely that during the coalition negotiations the Democratic Convention and the Democrat Party made the reservation that the DAHR should go “sotto voce” on these issues.²⁹ It can be assumed that this was the minimum requirement on the part of these parties.

²⁹ This is an assumption, but this was also suggested by László Tőkés in his presentation in Temesvár entitled “*Arguments and counter-arguments*”. In Bodó, Barna (ed.): *Kisebbségi érdekvédelem: kormányból és/vagy ellenzékéből*. Temesvár, 1997, 7.

There are two possible explanations for this. On the one hand, none of these parties supported the DAHR's strive for autonomy, on the other, none of them wanted to expose itself to the attacks of the opposition.

Basically, this was a rational demand on the part of the coalition partners, but this was in contradiction with the programme and goals of the DAHR.

As a result of the coalition negotiations, the DAHR had the right to appoint two ministers in the government to lead the Ministry of Tourism and the Office for the Protection of Minorities, the latter established in January 1997. (These positions were taken by Ákos Birtalan and György Tokay, respectively.) Later in lieu of the Ministry of Tourism, the DAHR received the Ministry of Health Care and in the first two years of the coalition it received 11 state secretarial positions.³⁰

At local and county level the DAHR obtained two positions of prefect and eight positions of vice-prefect. The participation of the DAHR in the government coalition improved the position of a number of settlements chiefly inhabited by ethnic Hungarians, but since most of this took place at an informal level, we can only say that it only seems to be likely that this improved the situation of a part of the Hungarian minority in Romania.³¹

Political experts like to divide the 4-year government cycle into the periods of the Ciorbea, the Vasile and the Isărescu governments. It is a general view that the Ciorbea government was the most favourable for the Hungarian minority in Romania. At first sight this seems to be true, but we must not forget that before the 8 July 1997 NATO summit in Madrid Romania cherished hopes of joining NATO in the first round. In reality the chances were slim, but they could not be ruled out entirely.

This was the time when the DAHR positions were the most favourable, because it was a key issue for Romania to demonstrate results in the handling of national minority issues. The concluding of the basic agreement between Romania and Hungary, the participation of the DAHR in the government coalition and the decisions favourable for the Hungarian but also for the other minorities, all proved to the West that the then Romanian government had changed its orientation. The Ciorbea government went as far as modifying the Act on Education passed in the previous government cycle with a govern-

³⁰ *Mérlegen*, op. cit., 67–70.

³¹ In the government apparatus at national and local level the DAHR placed in position at least 170 persons. *Mérlegen* op. cit., 3. This group brought in several dozen Hungarian employees to positions not in the hands of party distribution.

ment decree of urgency.³² This was the period when the DAHR might have had the opportunity to squeeze out a favourable decision in the matter of a state-financed Hungarian university. After the Madrid summit the DAHR lost a lot from its foreign policy-related importance for the Romanian political establishment. This had an effect on the governmental work of the subsequent period.

The most serious problem with joining the government was the way it had happened. Beyond theoretical and practical issues, the main problem was with the decision coming from the top, which was only subsequently made legitimate by the leadership. This was a breach of the principle of internal democracy and the role of the decision-making forum became questionable. All this seem to fit in the process of shifting the influence from the Council of Representatives towards the Operative Council.³³

Arguments of the opponents of coalition

The self-evaluations of the DAHR list the successes and failures during the 4-year government cycle.³⁴ The evaluation given by the internal opposition of the DAHR puts the emphasis on the way of joining the government and on failures, and calls the DAHR to account for its debts in building the Hungarian society and observing internal democracy.

While the DAHR's own evaluations emphasise the results achieved in the legislation process and in the economic reform, the evaluations of its internal opposition make no mention of them.

We can discover two parallel lines of discourse which intensify the already existing cleavages within the DAHR. The leadership of the DAHR used the tactics of "small steps", based on the conviction that rights must be fought for step-by-step and to win this fight compromises are necessary. The opposition, however, sets out from the conviction that the Hungarian minority in Romania is entitled to have certain rights and in key issues there is no

32 A comparison of the 84/1995 Act on Education and its 1999 amendment is given in *Mérlegen*, op. cit., 14–16.

33 "The Operative Council has essentially taken over the full authority of political decision-making within the DAHR." Miklós Bakk: "Hatáskör-módosulás" (*Modification of the sphere of authority*). *Krónika*, 20 January 2001.

34 See the materials of the 1997 DAHR Congress in Csíkszereda and the publication *Mérlegen 2000*.

room even for a temporary compromise.³⁵ The standpoints are rigid and it seems to be unlikely the two camps will approach one another.

The “opponents” identify the group accepting and creating the coalition with the so-called “Neptun Group”³⁶ of 1992–93. In their opinion, this group’s joining the coalition was carried out in a coup-like way, without having any legitimacy. Joining the coalition was subsequently legitimised with the Council of Representatives. They did not reckon properly with the consequences and did not “ask a proper price for the goose”.³⁷ They entered the coalition without any or any publicly known contract. The opposition accuses the DAHR of not representing and not fulfilling the goals in its programme. In their view, the DAHR did not function efficiently in terms of public representation, interest reconciliation, identity protection, self-organisation and internal pluralism, and abandoned its original goals.³⁸

This became evident during the government cycle, but the roots of the problem lay in the period preceding it. The conclusion of the opponents of the coalition was that the leaders of the DAHR should be replaced and the DAHR should return to the principles and the programme agreed upon at its 1993 Brassó congress. In our view, this criticism refers to the activities of the DAHR, rather than its participation in the coalition. Joining the coalition was criticised as a move taken without a prior internal decision and without a contract.³⁹

On the part of the Romanians, since 1996 it became an interest of the actual power establishment in Bucharest to include the DAHR in the government, because this was the scenario in which it could best control and influence the politics of the DAHR. At the beginning the actual Romanian government needed good relations with the DAHR to strengthen its international acceptance, but with this it also had to provide the Hungarian party at least with a minimum bargaining position.

35 This view is suggested by the presentations held at the 1997 Temsevár Conference (László Tókécs, Barna Bodó, Imre Borbély). In Bodó, Barna (ed.): *Kisebbségi érdekvédelem: kormányból és/vagy ellenzékéből*. Temesvár, 1997.

36 György Frunda, László Borbély, and György Tokay.

37 This is a reference by Imre Borbély to the metaphor of Béla Markó. *Kisebbségi érdekvédelem...* op. cit.

38 Attila Borbély Zsolt: “Markónak mennie kell” (*Markó must go*). *Erdélyi Napló*, 1999, No. 17.

39 Tókécs László: “Érvek és ellenérvek” (*Arguments and counter arguments*). In *Kisebbségi érdekvédelem* op. cit. and *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1998, No. 2. by several authors: Barna Bodó, Imre Borbély – Attila Borbély Zsolt, Géza Szócs.

In the following sections we examine some high-priority areas for the DAHR.

Inter-ethnic coexistence

The primary sources of information about inter-ethnic coexistence are the data of the opinion polls. In the view of the general population and also of the Hungarian minority alone, the situation in the country is deteriorating. For the Hungarian minority (as for the Romanian majority) the greatest problems are corruption, unemployment, decreasing standards of living and inflation, and only after these follow the characteristic problems of the Hungarian minority (autonomy, use of the mother tongue, university, etc.).⁴⁰

According to the polls of Ethnobarometer in May-June 2000, the relationship between Romanians and Hungarians had improved as compared to the conditions before 1996. This view was shared both by Romanians and Hungarians, with the latter group showing a greater ratio of satisfaction.⁴¹ Since the participation of the DAHR in the government, both Romanians and Hungarians had thought that the situation of the Hungarians had improved and only a very few thought that their situation had deteriorated. Nevertheless, there was a great difference in judging the rights of national minorities. 83.1% of Hungarians thought that national minorities were in a legally disadvantageous situation.

In spite of this widespread view and of the growing segregation of "Hungarian lifeworld" in Romania, inter-ethnic relations are not tense. On the everyday level, in spite of mutual prejudices, there are few open conflicts between Romanians and Hungarians. It seems to be more likely that Hungarians are on better terms with the supporters of the coalition parties than of the opposition parties, but severe problems are seldom reported in the press.

Due to the acts and government decrees passed after 1996, institutional discrimination has probably decreased, but in a state pursuing an ethnicised policy the chances are slim that it will totally disappear in the short or medium run. The results achieved by the DAHR while in the government overwhelmingly belong to the sphere of anti-discriminatory measures and measures of language policy (concerning the official use of the mother tongue). From third-level goals of identity policy and of the building of the Hungari-

⁴⁰ *Romániai magyarok 2000*, CCRIT, 22.

⁴¹ *Ethnobarometer*, CCRIT, 2000 May-June, 22.

ans' own institutions, the DAHR concentrated on the creation of governmental structures serving the management of minority issues.⁴²

Bilateral inter-state relations: Romania and Hungary

The structure of relations between Hungary and its neighbours is determined by three spheres of problems: differing interests stemming from the neighbouring situation; historical complexes; and the minority issue. In terms of Romania, since 1989, the key question of the relations has been the situation of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. At a theoretical level this is based on different interpretations of the concept of nation and minority rights. At the level of inter-state relations, other types of relations (such as economic and integrational relations) are of secondary importance. This aspect of relations also depends on the priorities of the two countries, in a sense if they are or are not impelled to cooperate by foreign political factors. It also depends on the composition and the minority policy of the actual governments of both countries.

As is known, the treaty between Hungary and Romania⁴³ was signed by the government coalition of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Association of Free Democrats as well as the government of the Party of Social Democracy in Romania in September 1996. According to the evaluation given by the then governing Hungarian parties, the signing of this agreement decisively contributed to and created the conditions for the improvement of Romanian-Hungarian relations. According to the then opposition in the Hungarian parliament, it was a mistake to conclude the agreement in this form, especially with the then Romanian government.⁴⁴

Though widely criticised, the basic agreement contributed to the fact that the DAHR was invited to participate in the next government. It is diffi-

42 A survey of this is given in the next section.

43 Treaty between the Republic of Hungary and Romania on Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighborhood, Timișoara, 16 September 1996.

44 "Memorandum of the National Presidency of FIDESZ-MPP (*Association of Young Democrats – Hungarian Civic Party*) on the Romanian-Hungarian basic agreement". In Csaba Lőrincz – Zolt Németh – Viktor Orbán – Zoltán Rockenbauer: *Nemzetpolitika '88–'98*. Budapest: Osiris, 1998, 306–307. A press analysis of the domestic political debate was given by Éva Kovács and Péter Csígó: "Európai integráció vagy/és kisebbségvédelem? A román magyar alapszerződés sajtóvitája" (*European integration and/or protection of minorities? Press debate on the Romanian-Hungarian basic treaty*). Budapest, 2000, In Sik Endre-Tóth Judit (eds.): *Diskurzusok a vándorlásról*. Budapest: NMMK, 2000, 252–278.

cult to imagine that this would have happened, had there been no basic agreement of its type. Both parties made a compromise by signing the basic agreement, but perhaps the Hungarian party made the greater one (recommendation 1201, the issue of returning church property, the cause of the Hungarian university). We should also not forget that the basic agreement was mainly concluded with a view to NATO accession and we can assume that neither of the signatory parties counted on resolving the minority issue. In spite of this, the agreement provides a basis of reference for both parties and is interpreted according to the particular interests of the signatories. Hungarian foreign policy supported Romania's accession to various international organisations in different international forums and also bilateral relations between the two countries became more intensive with the establishment of several inter-ministerial relations. The principle of Hungarian minority policy whereby the Hungarian government supports the demands of the organisations of the Hungarian minority has not led to diplomatic complications.⁴⁵ It is an important fact that the representatives of Hungarian foreign politics have not lodged any protest against Romania at any level.

It is difficult to decide if the improvement of the relations between Romania and Hungary have improved due to the DAHR's participation in the coalition or due to the new, more pro-Western coalition, or perhaps due to the signing of the basic agreement. What is certain is that before 1996 the chances of the opening of the Hungarian Consulate in Kolozsvár (Cluj) would have been extremely slim and in all probability the financial support of the Hungarian-language private university with Hungarian money would have been much more problematic. Mutual visits have become frequent between politicians of Hungary and Romania, in the course of which many important agreements have been concluded. Among these agreements the ones concerning guest workers and the opening of new border crossing points must be underlined. It is a very important phenomenon that the case of the pollution of the Tisza river did not trigger off a wave of political hysteria in either country.⁴⁶ Thanks to the participation of the DAHR in the government, different meet-

45 Diplomatic tensions arose in 2001 when the Hungarian Parliament passed the *Act on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries*.

46 Csilla Zsigmond: "A ciánszennyeződés mediátizálása a Népszabadság, a Magyar Nemzet és a HVG hasábjain" (*Media coverage of the cyanide pollution in the dailies Népszabadság and Magyar Nemzet and in the weekly HVG*). *Pro Minoritate*, 2000, No. 1., 139–147.

ings have been organised and agreements have been concluded in an easier way. In this sense *the DAHR has primarily played a mediating role.*

The Hungarians in Romania had a positive opinion about the relations between Romania and Hungary in recent years and are expecting further improvement. Also in this connection, a greater percentage of Hungarian respondees of the opinion polls shared this view as compared to Romanians.⁴⁷

For the Horn government⁴⁸ in Hungary the top priority was Hungary's EU integration and the issue of Hungarian minorities living beyond the present borders of Hungary was considered as a professional issue within foreign policy and slightly fell into the background. The issue of integration was also of primary importance for the Orbán government, but the problems and support of Hungarian minorities beyond the borders, even at the expense of the former, became more emphatic as an issue of national policy and as a main item in the common ideological basis of the coalition parties.

In Romania the former government⁴⁹ was not a true partner for the Hungarian minority. With the DAHR as a partner in the coalition, the government led by the Democratic Convention of Romania had a more positive attitude to the minority issue. Partly, the politicians of the coalition parties had a more positive attitude to the minority issue, partly this was also dictated by political interest. It would be a mistake to think that the basic attitude of the new government was significantly different from that of the politicians of the former government (in the new government, the idea of a more lenient national state neutral to the use of language seemed to prevail),⁵⁰ and it should be clear to all that the DAHR could only expect a degree of support from here to implement its own programme.

With regards to the policy concerning ethnic Hungarians, the Orbán government was more active than its predecessor. It was more open in the support of the endeavours of the Hungarian minority in Romania in the form of declarations, visits and financial subsidies. In spite of this activity, the relations between the two states remained stable. This can partly be explained by the Hungarian participation in the government and partly by the

⁴⁷ *Romániai magyarok 2000*, CCRIT, 22

⁴⁸ The government led by Gyula Horn, 1994–1998.

⁴⁹ The governments led consecutively by Victor Ciorbea, Radu Vasile, and Mugur Isărescu, 1996–2000.

⁵⁰ This line of Romanian policy concerning the Hungarian minority was represented by Zenobie Păclășianu between the two world wars and now by Valentin Stan.

foreign political orientation of the government in Bucharest, which accepted the fact that its good relations with the DAHR would improve its chances in the Euro-Atlantic integration.

Model relations in the period from 1996 to 2000?

It has become clear from the above how much the relations between Romania and Hungary depend on the ups and downs of foreign politics. In order for us to answer the question concerning an appropriate model we must clarify the basics first. In this field there are different kinds of functioning models, but the majority of these models cannot be fully adopted. Regarding our topic, a growing number of references have been made recently to the constant participation of the Swedish People's Party in the Finnish government coalition. These remarks seem to ignore the existence of a background of minority rights and national policy into which the activities of the Swedish People's Party are embedded. It is this very background for the creation of which the DAHR accepted participation in the government coalition.

At the level of inter-state relations this is likely to be the optimum model: the relations of Hungary to a neighbouring country, in the government of which the representatives of the Hungarian minority also participate. This can prove that the government in power in Romania maintains a partnership with the Hungarians and that Hungarians can participate in making and implementing decisions, thereby shaping their own fate. Relations of this kind also pave the way favourably for state subsidies coming from Hungary. In this respect, the Hungarian minority is a true beneficiary of the situation.

At the same time we cannot regard these as model relations, because the handling of the problems of minorities has not been resolved yet. Although it is difficult to decide exactly when the minority issue can be viewed as "resolved", it seems sure that a basic criterion is that the decisive majority of both the members and the elite of the national minority should agree that the conditions for preserving their community and national identity are given. In order to achieve this, some form of autonomy and independent institutions are required. The former has not been implemented at all, the latter has been implemented only partially. The mere fact that the political party of a minority takes part in the government does not signify too much. There is, of course, a potential chance for such a party to implement some goals of

its programme, but for issues of vital importance they need the support of the majority. For this the DAHR was not given ample support.

On the basis of the above, President Clinton's statement that there was a model solution to these problems in Romania can be a base of reference only in the shadow of the events that took place in Kosovo, but does not hold in central Europe.⁵¹ The DAHR's participation in the government coalition can, in the best case, be regarded as the first step in the process of working out a model solution. It is not only governmental participation, but also the creation of consocial relations and their institutions which we regard as the central issue. For this reason, in the following sections we would like to enumerate concrete results achieved by the DAHR as a governing party and the relation of these results to the goals stated in the election and congress programmes, in other words, to the image of the future constructed for the minority society.

Protecting minority interests/minority policy

In the field of minority policy the DAHR has given voice to political priorities for the provision of individual and collective rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania and has initiated measures for the consolidation of a Hungarian system of institutions.

The implementation of the governmental priorities of the DAHR

In this case the task of the analyst seems to be easy. He should take the document entitled *Priorities of action of the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania*⁵² and check what has been implemented thereof.⁵³ However, implementation of the majority of the priorities listed in the document did not depend on the DAHR and for the majority of targeted measures the DAHR had worked out drafts of bills, the majority of which had not passed the stage of negotiation in parliament and in the parliamentary committees by the end of the government cycle, as will be discussed later.

51 The letter of Reform Tömörítés (*Reform Group*) with 150 signatories at the Csíkszereda Congress, *Szabadság*, 15 May 1999.

52 *RMDSZ Közlöny (DAHR Newsletter)*. 27 November 1997, 20-24.

53 Priorities have been compared to the relevant chapters of the publication *Mérlegen*.

In *foreign policy* there was no success with NATO⁵⁴ accession and the abolition of visa obligations for Romanian citizens in the EU⁵⁵, but there was success in improving relations between Romania and Hungary and *in the economy* in creating industrial parks, developing a system of support for small and medium-size enterprises and introducing personal income tax. The most significant result achieved by the DAHR was the restructuring of the Ministry of Tourism. These partial results did not introduce a real change in the structure of the Romanian economy and the economic priorities of the DAHR were only partially successful. *At the level of local government* there was no success in confirming the government decree of urgency in the parliament.⁵⁶

The legal conditions of the assets management of local authorities were created by the acts on local funds, on public property, on the legal status of roads and on concessions. Laws were also successfully passed on local referenda and on public servants.⁵⁷ In other words, with the exception of the confirmation of the government decree of urgency, the rest of the goals were fulfilled. *In the field of minority policy* the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages was successfully ratified and minority protection provisions of laws strengthening local government were successfully worked out.

54 Since then, Romania was invited to join NATO in Autumn 2002.

55 Romania will join the EU not prior to 2007.

56 The government decree of urgency No. 22 passed in the spring of 1997 modifying the Act on Local Public Administration (1991/69) guaranteed that in those units of public administration where the ratio of persons belonging to a minority community exceeds 20%, the agenda of the local or county council must also be published in the mother tongue of the minority community.

In those councils in which the number of councillors belonging to a minority community reaches one third of the total number of the councillors, the mother tongue of the minority community can also be used in the meetings.

In those units of public administration where the ratio of persons belonging to a minority community exceeds 20%, an appropriate number of persons responsible for maintaining written or oral public relations must know the mother tongue of the minority community.

In those units of public administration where the ratio of persons belonging to a minority community exceeds 20%, these persons can turn to the authorities either in writing or orally in their mother tongue and will receive an answer in this language. If the representative or the employee of the local authority does not know this language, the mayor's office is obliged to provide an official interpreter. At the same time, the local authorities in these settlements are obliged to provide public notices in the mother tongue of the minority community.

This government decree could not come into force due to the first coalition crisis and then on account of the decision of the Constitutional Court (taken on 19 May 1998).

57 *Mérlegen*, op. cit, 46–48.

The framework law on minority protection was not accepted, but the anti-discriminatory law was already drafted in August, 2000 and it will be the task of the government led by the Party of Social Democracy in Romania to pass it. The most complex issue is that of the return of community and church property. In 1997–98 several government decrees were passed on this matter (1997/21; 1998/13), some of the indicated 22 properties were returned (including the Petőfi House in Bucharest and the Brassai Lyceum in Kolozsvár). The 1999/83 government decree of urgency ordered the return of 63 properties belonging to minority communities and in December the list was complemented with 53 new items. Twenty-eight of them have been returned to date. After the government decree a separate committee was set up to approve of the list of properties to be returned and another committee was set up to examine whether, considering their present use, the properties can or cannot be returned. Recording the properties' new owners in the land register involves a kind of lawsuit. After this complicated procedure only nine items in the property of Hungarian communities have been registered so far. And out of these nine, only the Petőfi House in Bucharest and the Episcopal Palace of the Calvinist Church in Nagyvárad (Oradea) have been actually taken in possession.⁵⁸ The 1921 land reform involved the appropriation of 85% of the landed properties of the Hungarian churches. Now the churches could make claims in respect of 15% of their pre-1918 property, but this too only became possible within the geographically defined limitations given in Act 1 of 2000.

Among priorities featured “the monitoring of regulations prohibiting assimilation by force and the modification of the demographic composition of regions inhabited by minorities”. The Székelyudvarhely-Cserehát case and the expansion of the institutions of the Orthodox Church in Székelyföld (a region of Transylvania chiefly inhabited by Szekler-Hungarians) showed that the coalition did not have the necessary determination to enforce these regulations.⁵⁹

Among *educational* priorities, satisfying the local needs of Csángó-Hungarian (Hungarian speaking natives of Moldavia) education and the restoration of the state-supported Hungarian University of Sciences in Kolozsvár

⁵⁸ Information provided by Attila Markó, who worked at that time in the Office for National Minorities.

⁵⁹ Jenő Szász: Székelyudvarhelyi Cserehát – áru vagy próbakő? (*Székelyudvarhely-Cserehát – goods or touchstone?*) In *Romániai Magyar Évkönyv* 2000, op. cit., 178–183.

failed. In the other fields, such as the educational reform, modification of the law on education, the expansion of the scale and the number of students of schools where the language of teaching can also be Hungarian, the DAHR scored significant successes.⁶⁰ The issue of Hungarian-language higher education was the one that most severely tested relations between the DAHR and the other partners in the coalition, and almost led to the DAHR leaving the government. At the same time, the issue of an autonomous Hungarian university was the pivotal issue within the DAHR, which also divided the party itself. It is not a professional issue to decide what the DAHR should have done in that situation.⁶¹

In *cultural life* progress was made in utilising the funds of the General Directorate of National Minority Affairs through competitive tenders. The laws listed as priorities were drafted with the exception of the Cultural Statute for National Minorities, but were not passed.

Of priorities pertaining to *churches*, the establishment of denominational educational institutions of all faiths was achieved only within the framework of private education. There was no success in creating the Act on Church Affairs, in returning confiscated church property and in introducing Hungarian-language church services for the Csángó-Hungarians in Moldavia.

In summary, of government priorities, the greatest results concerning structure and the use of language were achieved in the fields of local government and education. But in two key areas, in the return of church and community property and in the restarting of a Hungarian-language state university, the DAHR achieved only partial results.

Legislative work

In the two houses of parliament, certain laws were initiated jointly by the members of the coalition, while others were initiated by the DAHR alone.

60 László Murvai: Magyar nyelvű oktatás Romániában (*Hungarian-language education in Romania*) (1989–1999) *ibid.*, 104–113.

61 The meeting of the Council of Representatives on 5–6 September 1998 took a decision about leaving the government if the demand for the university was rejected. *Szabadság*, 7 September 1998; The proposal of László Tőkés to wait and see, *Háromszék*, 7 September; Government meeting of 30 September 1998 (*Proposal of the Petőfi-Schiller multicultural university*), *Népújság*, 2 October 1998; A new decision of the Council of Representatives on staying in the coalition, *Szabadság*, 5 October 1998 and on the protests of the Romanian opposition, *Szabadság*, 8 October 1998.

In addition to these, a number of measures concerning minority policy were introduced without the usual legislative process through government decrees of urgency. The parliamentary group and the individual members of the DAHR initiated a total of 89 bills. Regarding their distribution by number only, most of them (19) referred to the expansion of local government, but the majority of the latter group (14) initiated a change of the public administrative classification status of certain municipalities.

Another important group of initiatives aimed at the creation of a friendly environment for enterprises (9), the support of small and medium-size enterprises (4) and economic privatisation (6). A significant ratio of drafts initiated by the DAHR dealt with the management of pastures and forests (8) and with labour and social security regulations (9). However, two-thirds of the drafts (61) only succeeded in getting on the agenda of the Senate, the House of Representatives or the specialised parliamentary committees. Only 13 drafts initiated by the DAHR became concrete acts of law. Two of them are important from the point of view of Hungarians in Romania: the return process of land property concerning arable land of more than 10 hectares and forests of more than 1 hectare as well as common, church and community land property and the practical regulations thereof (1997/167) and the maximizing of the returnable land in 50 hectares for arable land and 10 hectares for forest (2000/1). Three other successful initiatives resulted in the acts on the creation of industrial parks and on the support of small and medium enterprises. Altogether three drafts initiated by the DAHR were rejected, but only one of them had an indirect bearing on minority policy.⁶²

If we survey the legislative work of the coalition thematically, we must underline the government decree of urgency modifying the Act on Education providing the right of learning in one's own mother tongue at all levels of education and the modification of the act on local public administration to the same effect. The latter provides the right of official use of the mother tongue if the ratio of a national minority is higher than 20%.⁶³

In terms of the return and confirmation of ownership of private property, the already mentioned two acts initiated by the DAHR represent the most important results. Similar to the former in importance are the acts of de-

62 1998/99: Draft of bill on support from the state budget of electricity, central heating, natural gas, water and sewage bills of religious denominations recognised by the state.

63 See footnote 56.

centralisation on regulating the legal conditions for autonomous assets management of units of public administration and on regulating the political autonomy of local communities, though the basic acts in these matters have not been passed yet.⁶⁴ In spite of this shortcoming, the decision-making power of local authorities has been significantly enlarged.

With respect to minority policy, in addition to the regulations on education and the use of the mother tongue, important progress has been made at the level of the local society and of the local ownership conditions. There are two more almost intangible aspects of parliamentary work which are also relevant to the work of the government. There was a high level of professional expertise among the DAHR representatives, which was a widely shared opinion in Romanian political life and thus a positive contribution to the image of Hungarians. The other important aspect, which also represents a step beyond the protection of minority rights based on a hurt and complaining attitude, is that if a minority politician is present in the processes of preparing certain decisions, certain topics and ideas cannot be reasonably suggested or raised. Such a public case was when the leaders of the National Minority Office took a stand against the planned erection of a statue of Antonescu⁶⁵ or when approval of the draft of the Act of Education was hindered in the specialised parliamentary committee.⁶⁶ And since cooperation with the minority political party is part of the party's policy, for the sake of indispensable cooperation, parties will carefully take into consideration whether they should use loud anti-minority rhetoric at all, since such attacks could be easily returned by the DAHR in government or parliamentary matters of a different nature.

Governmental work

In the governmental work of the DAHR we attach the greatest importance to the creation of *a governmental structure dealing with the minority issue*. In addition to the Office for the Protection of Minorities and the position of the minister without portfolio, the starting of regional offices and the drafts of bills prepared by the Office provided an opportunity to manage these specific problems.⁶⁷ The implementation of important bills initiated by the

64 *Mérlegen*, op. cit., 45–48.

65 *RMDSZ Tájékoztató (DAHR Information)*, 4 November 1999.

66 6 February 2000.

67 *Mérlegen*, op. cit., 4–6.

Office (anti-discriminatory law, the creation of the Institute for Minority Research, and the prolongation of the submission deadline for applications for compensation of the victims of political persecution) is now in the hands of the new government led by the Party of Social Democracy in Romania. In the Ministry of Education a State Secretariat for Minorities and a General Directorate responsible for Hungarian-language education were created.⁶⁸ At county level positions for chief inspector of education and inspectors responsible for Hungarian-language education were established. Within the Ministry of Education the Directorate for Minorities was enlarged and when the advisory boards were reorganised Hungarian professionals were co-opted onto each one of them. The most important development in this field was that 120 cultural institutions were transferred into the sphere of authority of local councils, which caused many issues concerning the use of the mother tongue and the building of institutions to be tackled at local level where, in the case of a Hungarian local authority, Hungarian cultural representation cannot be questioned.⁶⁹ Hungarian representation was provided in the county-level branch offices of the Ministry of Tourism and the State Assets Fund (State Property Agency). In three regions chiefly inhabited by Hungarians out of the 12 tourism regions the leaders of the ministerial branch offices were also Hungarians.⁷⁰

Allocation of resources is an important field of governmental activities. The significantly increased funds of the Office for the Protection of Minorities provided significant support for minority organisations and for various programmes for preserving national identity – in 1997 6 billion Lei (appr. HUF 60 million); in 2000 62.6 billion Lei (appr. HUF 782 million). In the Ministry of Education the enlargement of Hungarian-language training and the creation of new departments and institutions, at the Babeş-Bolyai University the creation of a line of Hungarian training paving the way for the Hungarian section of the University were considered as significant structural expansions.⁷¹ A proportional subsidy for Hungarian programmes represented an important breakthrough in the Ministry of Education (in 1997 67, in 2000 300 tenders were positively evaluated and supported with 5 billion

68 Ibid., 10.

69 Ibid., 18–20.

70 op. cit., 29.

71 András Magyarai – Pál Szilágyi – Zoltán Kása: A Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem 1989 és 2000 között. (*The Babeş-Bolyai University between 1989 and 2000*) *ibid.*, 71–80.

Lei in four years). For publishing books and periodicals, Hungarian institutions received state subsidies in 1997 for the first time. In a similar way for the first time was the erection of statues depicting leading figures of Hungarian history in public places financially supported by the Ministry.⁷² In the field of monument protection 10% of the ministerial funds were spent on restoring monuments of the Hungarian cultural heritage (32 projects altogether).

An indirect role in handling minority problems was played by those measures initiated by DAHR politicians which aimed at approaching the EU and strengthening the market economy and private property. Finally, we must mention that part of governmental work that led to concrete agreements between the Romanian and the Hungarian Ministries (e.g. recognition of university degrees obtained in Hungary, cooperation in monument protection and tourism).⁷³

Society

By participating in the government, the DAHR as a party represented and enforced the interests of the Hungarian minority more efficiently, but, as its critics claim, they allowed the issue of developing the Hungarian society in Romania fall into the background. The DAHR as a party put the emphasis on central, Bucharest-based politics and tried to solve general issues by taking part in legislation. We have already given a list of the fields of success and semi-success.

In safeguarding and enforcing the interests of the Hungarian minority we could witness some positive displacements from the previous situation. Today's task is no longer the handling of open ethnic conflicts and cases of discrimination, but the ensuring of rights to create and operate autonomous institutions. Thanks to the work of the coalition this problem was transferred to the level of local power. At this level, however, we must face the basic fact that very different interests are articulated in places where Hungarians live in majority than in those where they are in minority. All the programmes of the DAHR to date and the knowledge base of its apparatus were prepared for the latter situation. *In areas where Hungarians form a uniform (pure) ethnic block or where they live in majority, issues of modernisation rather than inter-ethnic problems are*

⁷² The making of the statue of Mikó in Sepsiszentgyörgy and of Petőfi in Marosvásárhely was supported by the Ministry of Education by 650 million Lei. Ibid., 19.

⁷³ Ibid.

*in the focus of attention. For these issues, however, the DAHR apparatus has been unable to find more up to date and more efficient solutions than the usual Romanian ones.*⁷⁴

Cleavages within the DAHR

It cannot be decided from a professional point of view whether the strengthening or weakening of cleavages is desirable or not in debates within the elite or between the elites in the case of a national minority. There are two existing views in this respect. According to the first, it is by all means politically desirable that the *unity* of the minority party should be preserved and that it should take joint action to pursue its own interests. This concept is based on the assumption that the Hungarian minority in Romania has collective interests and it is easier to represent these interests in unity and thus no votes are wasted in an election. In this way more representatives can have seats in the parliament and the party's position in any political bargain is stronger. The second view, which puts less emphasis on the collective interests of the Hungarian minority, claims that different political and regional interests can be better represented if they can be articulated. The development of platforms happened in order to bridge this problem, but in lieu of an appropriate structure there is a risk of a split in the party. For the time being, none of the groups dared take this step.

Surveys allow us to draw the conclusion that the Hungarians living in Romania have a quite uniform view about the DAHR's participation in the government, whereas at the level of the elite there is a distinct separation of the two groups. According to an opinion poll of the CCRIT in February 1999, 85% of Hungarians thought that the DAHR represented the interests of Hungarians and 75% of them thought that the DAHR had contributed to resolving the problems of the country and valued its governmental activities positively. Only 8% of the respondees thought that the DAHR did not care at all or cared little (1% and 7%, respectively) with the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. According to the survey, 78.8% of respondees supported the DAHR remaining in the government and 9% were against it. On the basis of the other questions of the survey, a great percentage of the Hungarians in Romania judged the role of the DAHR in the government positively and would like it to remain in the coalition. A completely different pic-

⁷⁴ We have reached this conclusion by surveying the press coverage in Székelyföld of the municipal elections.

ture is obtained if we examine the popularity of Iliescu or the Party of Social Democracy among Hungarians in Romania, but to our knowledge opinion polls ordered by the DAHR did not cover this aspect.

In contrast, the leading personalities of the Reform Group (in Hungarian: Reform Tömörülés), the World Association of Hungarians (in Hungarian: Magyarok Világszövetsége) and Transylvanian Hungarian Initiatives (in Hungarian: Erdélyi Magyar Kezdeményezés) often attacked the leadership of the DAHR for its participation in the government.⁷⁵ It must be mentioned that the situation represented only some new opportunities for them to give voice to their criticism of the DAHR. In this sense, the DAHR taking a governmental role only intensified the already existing cracks or cleavages. These conflicts also became evident with the local and preliminary elections and in relation to the issue of a status law for ethnic Hungarians versus granting Hungarian citizenship for ethnic Hungarians living abroad.⁷⁶

This internal opposition would like to return to the programme of the Brassó congress (held in 1993) at which a strategy for national autonomy was outlined and which, in their view, would serve the further existence and growing prosperity of the Hungarian minority. This is a model of local authorities based on internal pluralism. We must note that very few steps had been taken in this direction even before entering the coalition and after 1996 this approach totally fell into the background. The reason behind this was that between 1993 and 1996 the external conditions for implementing the model were not ensured and there was also a lack of political will, while after 1996 the role in the government brought into the foreground another form of enforcing interests based on political and party struggles.

The issue of divisions within the DAHR can be evaluated from two points of view. If “unity” is the main value, then participation in the coalition further deepened the conflict between the groups. If *internal pluralism* is the main value, the poignant expression of internal conflicts is a positive phenomenon, which starts (or continues) a process of internal democratisation. It is difficult to decide which approach can give more support to the further existence and strengthening of the Hungarian minority in Romania, which we as-

75 Tibor Toró T., Imre Borbély, Ádám Katona

76 Initially, the DAHR supported the concept of the “status law”, while the internal opposition of the DAHR, which was partly organised around the Transylvanian Society of the World Association of Hungarians, gave its preference to the concept of dual-citizenship for ethnic Hungarians.

sumed as a basic criterion. The key issue is the problem of stability. If Romanian national politics can choose from several Hungarian negotiating partners, the bargaining position of the Hungarian minority will significantly deteriorate. This has been the fundamental problem of Hungarian minority politics in Romania since 1920. Instead of rigidly sticking to the concept of unity, one should rather start out from the lack of processes of integration. In this respect, the political elite of the DAHR has severely weakened during the past four years. As the DAHR gradually fractionalised as a party, the mosaic-like network of personal, regional, generational and economic interest groups, which developed as the daily needs of government participation dictated, became increasingly rigid after 1998. The attempt by Béla Markó, president of the DAHR, and his followers to form a centre grouping failed. At the congress in Csíkszereda it became clear that there was a 40% opposition to the leadership in the leading institutions of the DAHR.⁷⁷ In the period of municipal elections new DAHR elites at the county level and new economic interest groups emerged and the leadership was no longer able to integrate them. In fact, there was an attempt to push back the opposition which so clearly emerged in Csíkszereda, as the party was getting prepared for the position of parliamentary opposition, to prevent it from taking over leadership within the party after 2000. Following this, mediating politicians belonging to the centre and new, non-integrated local elites also orientated themselves towards the Reform Group. The Reform Group has no such integrative personality in its leadership who can be compared with Markó, no well-defined socio-political programme and its endeavours in collecting supportive signatures in the campaign for dual-citizenship were put to question in the Romanian public view by the present leadership of the DAHR through Budapest.⁷⁸ In addition to the model of local government, a fundamental theme of the Reform Group is the “federal/Transylvanian” programme, which occupied a central place in the election programme of the DAHR.⁷⁹

The opinion of Hungarians in Romania about possible participation in a future government coalition is rather diverse. 52.3% of those asked said that the DAHR should participate in the future government, regardless of which

77 At the Csíkszereda Congress of the DAHR out of 431 delegates 274 voted for Béla Markó and 157 voted for Előd Kincses, candidate of the Reform Group. *Romániai Magyar Szó*, 17 May 1999.

78 Presentation by Zsolt Németh on the priorities of the Hungarian foreign policy in Kolozsvár on 7 October 2000.

79 *RMDSZ Választási program 2000 (Election programme 2000)* RMDSZ, 62.

party wins the elections. 42.6% said that the DAHR should enter a coalition only with democratic parties. Only 1.8% thought that the party should not enter any coalition at all.⁸⁰

We should not forget the fact that those who received their position through the DAHR not only represent “Hungarian” interests but also carry out other “non-Hungarian” administrative functions. Those who are in the administration must carry out decisions in accordance with the government programme, on the one hand, and within this framework must fight for special Hungarian demands, on the other.

Social mobility

The impact of the government in connection with the issues of mobility, development of an image of the future and emigration is difficult to measure. Romanian statistics and surveys do not render sufficient data about the changes of social mobility and we know even less about national minorities in this respect. In addition, according to Romanian analyses, the government failed to implement reforms and to restructure the economy. After promising initial signs, the reform stopped short and impoverishment became more characteristic in society. This is reflected by opinion poll data which suggest a turn to pre-1996 anti-reform and redistributive politics. Naturally, this also has an effect on the Hungarian minority and we have no reason to assume that these processes are less relevant to the Hungarian minority.

As far as mobility is concerned, we have some view only of the elite.⁸¹ First of all we must say that the DAHR did not really have to fight for funds necessary for its functioning. It covered its expenses partially from state subsidies, but, for the greater part, from funds coming from Hungary, primarily from funds of public foundations of Hungarian civil society (NGOs). Locally collected membership fees only covered a part of local expenditure. The elite actually depended on state redistribution, involving two states, though this naturally holds true only for a part of the political elite. Gradually, in the wake of parliamentary and municipal elections, a growing number of DAHR representatives made a living from Romanian state salaries or supplemented their private income with them. This latter income partially explains

⁸⁰ *Ethnobarometer*, CCRIT, May-June 2000, 42.

⁸¹ Primarily on the basis of the publication *Mérlegen*, in which the names of those who obtained positions in state administration are given.

why intellectuals were gradually pushed out from politics by a social stratum of entrepreneurs and “technocrats”. In the course of social change only those parliamentary and administrative representatives were able to perform who had public administrative or economic skills and had a very clear view of their own interests. (This trend already started in the early 1990’s and was only intensified by the DAHR’s participation in the government.)

Mobility primarily affected the political and economic elite. (We have included in the political elite those who got into positions delegated by the DAHR with the change of government.) The already mentioned division within the party was reproduced by the fact that positions in the state administration were given to those who were close to the current leadership of the DAHR. Due to this fact this group had naturally a more positive attitude to the party’s role in the government. This group is not so large and influential as in Slovakia where, in the days following the election, the MKP⁸² (mainly the ex-MPP⁸³ members) had ready-made lists of persons and positions demanded. This did not happen in the case of the DAHR, simply because Romanian politics is not programme and contract driven, but based on personal bargains.

Intellectuals are primarily the product of universities and as mentioned, significant progress was made in this field. However, for the time being, this progress represents a quantitative growth and there are severe shortcomings in quality. Genuine training for the elite takes place in small “workshops” and in Hungary. The number of emigrants from the middle of the 1990s started to rise again, especially among young people from middle-class families.⁸⁴ The majority of those who study in higher education in Hungary will not return to Romania. This, however, has nothing to do with the governmental role of the DAHR.

Conclusions

1) Based on our analysis, we may draw the conclusion that the DAHR’s participation in the government brought about more favourable than unfavourable changes for the Hungarian minority in Romania. It seems likely

⁸² Magyar Koalíció Pártja (*Party of Hungarian Coalition – Slovakia*)

⁸³ Magyar Polgári Párt (*Hungarian Civic Party – Slovakia*)

⁸⁴ The number of applications for immigration into Hungary from Romania: 1994: 4619; 1996: 3271; 1999: 5266. www.bm.hu/migráció/statisztika

that these changes could not have been achieved only through the external support for the government on the part of the DAHR. It also seems probable that, compared to the situation before 1996, there would have been some improvements in the fate of the Hungarian minority, even if the DAHR had only supported the government from outside. For the DAHR, however, it was very important to delegate some of its politicians to positions in the state administration. Thereby, the party had more information and had the opportunity to influence decisions. The deterioration of the general economic situation and the lack of implementing economic reforms promised exert a similar influence on the Hungarian minority in Romania as on the rest of the country. For this, however, the DAHR can only partly be blamed. The DAHR ran the risk that, with its governmental participation, the party would be blamed by Romanian voters for any occasional failures. This did not happen and nor did the Hungarian voters punish the DAHR for failures.

2) We can state that in issues of central importance for the DAHR only slight progress was made. No breakthrough was made in strengthening minority society, providing cultural reproduction and gaining autonomy for the Hungarian community. In order to achieve these goals some type of accepted autonomy and an autonomous system of institutions would be required. As background information we must add that the provision of and the fight for these demands are diametrically opposed to the concepts of the Romanian project of nation building. The question of Romanian support for these demands had not even been raised until 1996. The present government⁸⁵, which opposes such endeavours of the DAHR to a large extent, is not a real partner in this. It is likely that the government in general, and the Romanian coalition parties in particular, would have lost much of their popularity if they had supported those DAHR demands judged unacceptable by the Romanian voters and public opinion. According to opinion polls, in the view of Romanians Romanian-Hungarian relations improved, albeit that Romanians still considered the DAHR demands exaggerated.⁸⁶

3) The DAHR was naturally aware of the fact that its demands were not unanimously supported and therefore emphasised that it would do whatever it could without risking the collapse of the coalition. There were important consequences of this attitude. The programme for the local authorities stopped short. Looking back upon these four years, it seems that the DAHR

⁸⁵ The government led by Adrian Năstase; entered in office in 2000.

⁸⁶ *Etnobarometer2000* May-June, 45-46.

tried to utilise the opportunities deriving from governmental participation and made less effort to strengthen internal structures. This partly resulted in internal attacks against the DAHR leadership by Hungarians who were not in government functions and who increased their influence in certain other areas. According to the analysis of Zoltán A. Bíró, “bottom society”, even if it is a beneficiary of the coalitional role of the DAHR, would not give its moral support to it.⁸⁷

4) With the participation of the DAHR in the coalition, the non-governmental and non-parliamentary forums of the DAHR fell into the background. This was also a consequence of the DAHR becoming a political party increasingly concentrating on the elections. Local party organisations and the organisation of society are those areas which suffered most from participation in the coalition. The professionals from the Executive Presidency were drained away by governmental tasks. While the leader of the Executive Presidency made his voice heard in an increasing number of political issues, the importance of the institution significantly diminished as compared to the Bucharest centre.⁸⁸ The leadership of the DAHR suppressed attempts at local takeover of power, because these would have jeopardised placing its own people in winning positions during the next parliamentary elections. An adverse consequence of this was growing discontent within the DAHR in a part of the Hungarian population. This can explain the fact that many candidates of Hungarian nationality entered local elections as independent candidates outside the umbrella of the DAHR.

5) A *consocial* political structure develops where two or more subcultures are organised along with cleavages of religions, languages and ethnicity. Such typical cases are those of multinational societies such as Romania. We can speak of subcultures, and their institutionalised forms: the pillars, if more cleavages overlap. Thus *the sociological part of the model is applicable to Romania*, making a distinction between subcultures organised on Romanian and Hungarian national bases. *The political science part of the model*, which puts consocial democracy in the focus of its attention, is the subject of our further examination. The characteristic features of consocial democracy include a grand coalition in which language and religious groups are represented, the autonomy of these groups, their proportional representation, and a right of

⁸⁷ Zoltán Bíró A. op. cit., 129.

⁸⁸ Miklós Bakk: “Hatáskör módosítás” (*Modification of the sphere of authority*). *Krónika*, 20 January 2001.

veto of minorities in issues which affect them. Favourable conditions for creating a consocial democracy include the roughly similar sizes of the subcultures, the intention of cooperation between the elites, the former positive traditions in cooperation, the lack of external dangers and the geographic concentration of the groups. It would seem an exaggeration to apply the classical model to Romania and by no means can we speak here of consocial democracy. But on a descriptive level, we can speak of consocial practices and consociational agreements. By this we mean that negotiations on the relations between Romanians and Hungarians are conducted by the elite groups representing their subcultures. Agreements are concluded at top level ignoring their own subcultures with the assumption that the elite groups represent the views of their respective subcultures.

According to Lijphart, there are two main conditions that must be met for consociation. On the one hand, these elites must be willing to cooperate and ready for compromise, while on the other, these leaders must ensure the support of their own group for themselves.⁸⁹ *The biggest obstacle in Romania is that here we can speak of two groups pursuing their own nation building policy and their agreement would hinder the implementation of these very projects. In our view, as these projects are connected to issues of identity, agreement is impossible – especially in this case in which one group greatly outnumbers the other and has no real interest in agreements which may be disadvantageous for it and can democratically achieve what is in its interest by majority vote. Consocial practice was able to function when, because of foreign policy considerations, it was necessary to have the representatives of the minority in the government.*

In Romania subcultures are organised along the ethnic cleavage. There are also internal divisions within the Hungarian subculture. *By the end of 2000 the cleavage within the Hungarian minority in Romania seemed to be becoming institutionalised*, as determined by the conflict of the then leadership of the DAHR and its internal opposition. Regional, Catholic/Protestant and generational conflicts are not significant. The conflict characterised by the press as a moderate/radical conflict can also be described as representing differing views about integration. *The present leadership of the DAHR puts the emphasis on integrating Hungarian individuals in Romania into Romanian society, while its opposition supports the integration of the Hungarian minority as an autonomous society.* For this reason the opposition to the present leadership of the DAHR considers the

⁸⁹ Arend Lijphart: *Democracy in Plural Societies: a comparative exploration*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977.

party's role in the government detrimental to the development and strengthening of an autonomous Hungarian society in Romania. For handling these conflicting social and party interests, social control mechanisms also capable of controlling the political party are required (publicity, control of local authorities, concurrent groups, criticism of organisations, etc.)

It will be the key issue of identity policy of the coming years how the Hungarian elite in Romania will be able to use these mechanisms.