

THE MINORITY ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANIAN-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS BETWEEN DECEMBER 1989-JUNE 1991¹

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ABSTRACT:

THIS PAPER WILL TRY TO BRING INTO FOCUS THE EVOLUTION OF THE MINORITY ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF A PREVIOUSLY UNCHARTED SEGMENT OF THE HISTORY OF ROMANIAN-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS, SPANNING BETWEEN TWO TURNING POINTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE TWO COUNTRIES: THE DECEMBER 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE YUGOSLAV WARS OF SECESSION IN JUNE 1991. FREED FROM THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS OF THE COMMUNIST DISCOURSE, THE MINORITY ISSUE WILL HOLD A CENTRAL PLACE IN THE ROMANIAN-YUGOSLAV DIALOGUE OF THE EARLY POST-COLD WAR ERA AND WILL FACILITATE A NEW DYNAMIC IN THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, NOT ONLY AT A BILATERAL LEVEL BUT ALSO IN THE WIDER FRAMEWORK OF REGIONAL COOPERATION.

KEYWORDS: ROMANIA, YUGOSLAVIA, NATIONAL MINORITIES, BILATERAL RELATIONS, POST COLD WAR ERA.

INTRODUCTION

The new socio-political realities of post-revolutionary Romania which, after 1989, saw the Romanian state engaged in a transition process towards an existential model based on democracy and market economy and the new foreign policy objectives undertaken by

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the leadership that succeeded the Ceaușescu regime³ – built around the idea of connecting Romania to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes, promoting regional cooperation and, not least, the normalization of bilateral relations with neighboring countries⁴ – inevitably also led to a restructuring of the relations between Romania and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The minority issue will hold a central part in this development.

MAIN TEXT

The process of redefining Romanian-Yugoslav relations will be influenced by several factors. First of all, it had to also take into consideration the profound political crisis facing Yugoslavia in the early 1990s that made the evolution of the foreign policy promoted by Belgrade unpredictable, raising the issue of the continuity of this policy towards Romania as well. In this respect, the disintegration, in January 1990, of the monolithic leadership of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the free parliamentary elections that followed during that year generated a new political reality in this country, characterized by the redistribution of powers between the federal center and the republics and the emergence of new centers of political power⁵. Under pressure from the new republican governments that will plead, in varying degrees, against the traditional foreign policy goals of the federation, especially with concern to the priority that had been given in the last 30 years to the Non-Alignment Movement⁶, and as a result of the pivotal changes occurring on Europe's geopolitical scene, the early 1990s will mark a change of

³ On May 20, 1990, following the presidential elections - the first elections in post-communist Romania - Ion Iliescu, standing as a candidate of the National Salvation Front, became the first president democratically elected in Romania, totaling 85.07 percent of the 14,378,693 votes expressed, Institutul Național de Statistică, "The result of the presidential election of 20 May 1990", http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/resource/stat_electorale.pdf?view=true, accessed on 15 November 2012.

On June 28, 1990, the composition of the new government was established. It will be led by Petre Roman who will hold the position of Prime Minister of Romania until his resignation on September 26, 1991. On October 1, 1991, Theodor Stolojan will assume the leadership of the government, a position he will hold until November, 19, 1992. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be led, during the two governments, by Adrian Năstase.

⁴ See Ministerul Afacerilor Externe al României, "Carte Albă. Șase luni de preocupări, acțiuni și inițiative – iunie-decembrie 1990", in Adrian Năstase, *România după Malta. 875 de zile la Externe*, vol. 2 (1 noiembrie-31 decembrie 1990), (Bucharest: Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2006), 407-436.

⁵ Milan Andrejevich, "Redefining Priorities", Report on Eastern Europe, vol. 1, no. 52, December 28, 1990, 31.

⁶ Ibid. Yugoslavia was a co-founding member of the Non-Alignment Movement, established in 1955 during the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. The founders of the movement were Josip Broz Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah and Sukarno. The first conference of the Movement was held in Belgrade in 1961. In 1990, the Non-Alignment Movement numbered 102 full members, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, and 10 states with permanent observer status, including Romania.

direction in Yugoslav foreign policy. Thus, the focus of this policy will shift from subordination to the interests of the policy of non-alignment – which, in light of the end of the Cold War, had undergone a significant decrease of its importance – to participation in the European integration process, relations with its neighbours and Balkan cooperation⁷.

Thus, the new foreign policy options of Yugoslavia seemed to offer good prospects for more dynamic relations with Romania both at a bilateral level and within the framework of wider regional cooperation.

How would the Yugoslav leadership position itself towards post-revolutionary Romania would depend, however, also on the internal political developments and realities within the Romanian state. The violent overthrow of the communist regime, serious interethnic incidents, social unrest and a persistent economic and social instability, were major sources of concern for the authorities in Belgrade.

The Yugoslav media will paint an eloquent picture of these concerns. Described as being as „exciting” as a „live broadcast” from Bastille on the 14th of July 1979⁸, the events of December 1989 were broadcast to the world via the Belgrade television, the propaganda machine of Slobodan Milošević deciding to air the entire string of events⁹.

The condemnation of the Ceaușescu regime was in some Yugoslav political circles almost instantaneous. Thus, at the end of December, the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Montenegro proposed the issuing of a statement on behalf of the republic and of the Yugoslav federation, which would address

⁷ See "Declaration on the Further Integration of Yugoslavia into Integration Processes in Europe", Yugoslav Survey, vol. XXXI, no. 2, 1990, 49-52, see also the statement of the SFRY Presidium president Janez Drnovšek, made at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in "Statement by Dr Janez Drnovšek, President of the SFRY in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe" , Yugoslav Survey, vol. XXXI, no. 2, 1990, 52-58. For an overview of the foreign policy orientation of Yugoslavia in this period see also the exposition of the Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, Budimir Lončar, presented on January 31, 1990, at the French Institute of Foreign Relations in Budimir Lončar, "Yugoslavia and the World. Internal Problems and Foreign Policy Options", Review of International Affairs, vol. XLI, no. 956, February 5, 1990, 1-5.

⁸ Jovan Ćirilov, "Реч недеље. Румунијаш "(Word of the week: Romania), NIN, year XXXVII, no. 2035, December 31, 1989. A full report on the Romanian Revolution was made by Milan Milosević for the daily "NIN", see Milan Milosević, "Цена слободе" (The price of freedom), NIN, year XXXVII, no. 2035, December 31, 1989, 6-13.

⁹ Despite the view expressed by some of the opponents of the Milošević regime, neither him nor his supporters saw any similarities between the Ceaușescu couple and the Milošević couple. In this respect, Borisav Jović, the Serbian representative in the Collective Presidium of the RSFI, said: "Serbia is not Romania: here the army, the police and the people are on our side", quoted in Vidosav Stevanović, Milosevic. The People's Tyrant, translated from Serbian by Zlata Filipovic, (New York: IB Tauris Publishing, London, 2004), 47.

apologies to the Romanian people for „maintaining for so long and until the end relations with a regime that produced the material and spiritual destruction of his own people”¹⁰.

The subsequent developments in Romania continued to be closely monitored in Yugoslavia. In particular, the ethnic conflicts in March 1990 in Tîrgu Mureş had a strong echo in Belgrade. Speaking of the „Transylvanian road to hell”¹¹ and the „horror of Tîrgu Mureş”, „Politika. The International Weekly” accused the Romanian security forces of being „unprepared, uninformed or unacceptably inactive when the pogrom started”. Amid these events, the Yugoslav publication expressed its concern about the wave of „fascistoide” passions unleashed by individuals claiming to be the „defenders of the fatherland”¹². In the context of the emergence of organizations and political parties of nationalist orientation, like the Party of Romanian National Unity, the Greater Romania Part or Vatra Românească (Romanian Hearth), the Yugoslav journal marked out the possible ascension of these right-wing forces „in a country without long democratic traditions, which has made the transition from Antonescu’s Iron Guard directly to the ideological grip of the Stalinist Ceausescu regime”¹³. Yugoslavia’s concern with the emergence of extreme right parties in Romania aimed, in particular, at these organizations’ claims against the Yugoslav Banat, expressed in public during the election campaign in the spring of 1990. Thus, during the demonstrations, the displaying of placards in calling for the annexation of the Yugoslav Banat and the Soviet Moldova were very common¹⁴.

In relation to the violent suppression of popular protests in June 1990 in the University Square in Bucharest, the Yugoslav media considered that the „hard line” taken by the authorities, who, as a result of these events, had banned public gatherings in central squares, could not „automatically resolve the conflicts in Romania, which were very deep and violent”¹⁵.

Not least, in light of the wave of social protests in December 1990, „Politika. The International Weekly” noted that „Romania has spent the first anniversary of its new life in

¹⁰ "Предлог Председништва ЦК СК Црне Горе. Извињење румунском народу" (Proposal of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Montenegro. Apologies to the Romanian people), NIN, year XXXVII, no. 2035, December 31, 1989, 7.

¹¹ Julijana Mojsilović, „Romanian-Hungarian Tension. Transylvanian Road to Hell”, Politika. The International Weekly, year I, no. 2, March 31 – April 6, 1990.

¹² „Horror in Tîrgu Mureş”, Politika. The International Weekly, year I, no. 2, March 31 – April 6, 1990.

¹³ Ranko Petković, "Balkan Enigma", Review of International Affairs, vol. XLI, no. 959, March 20, 1990, 5.

¹⁴ Radislav Ćuk, "Elections in Eastern Europe. What is Romania Afraid of?", Politika. The International Weekly, year I, no. 5, 21-27 April, 1990.

¹⁵ Idem, "Protests in Romania and Bulgaria. Road to Military Dictatorship", Politika. The International Weekly, year I, no. 24, 1-7 September, 1990.

an atmosphere of tension, suspense and ominous expectation". The Yugoslav correspondent in Bucharest also highlighted the poor state of the economy, the scarcity of consumer products available for the population and the disillusionment felt by the Romanians towards the way the society evolved in the year that had passed from the achievement of the Romanian Revolution¹⁶.

All these developments were a major concern for Yugoslavia not only by the fact that they were taking place at the borders of the federation and in relation to a people for whom it manifested genuine sympathy, but especially in the context of the existence of a significant Yugoslav minority on Romanian territory.

The minority problem represented, otherwise, a sensitive issue in the bilateral relations between Romania and Yugoslavia before the Romanian revolution. Under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, the economic and political relations between Yugoslavia and Romania were solid and this was due in most part to the fact that Tito had developed its policy on the Balkans around his personal relationship with Ceaușescu. Relations between the two states suffered, subsequently, a rebound as the Yugoslavs became increasingly dissatisfied with the treatment of the Yugoslav minorities by the Ceaușescu regime. At the same time, Belgrade looked upon his leadership style as being anachronistic, while Ceaușescu seemed to consider post-Titoist Yugoslavia as a partner without effective leadership¹⁷. Finally, Yugoslavia disputed the figures published by the Romanian authorities relative to the size of the Yugoslav minority in Romania. According to the 1977 census, 34.034 Serbs, 7.617 Croats, 1.179 Macedonian Romanians and 707 Slovenes lived on Romanian territory. According to Yugoslav estimates, however, in Romania lived around 50.000 Serbs and 20.000 Croats. One Croatian estimate put the number of Croats in Romania to approximately 30.000¹⁸.

In light of the profound political crisis facing Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the same kind of concerns were felt by the authorities in Bucharest in relation to the situation of the Romanian minority in Yugoslavia¹⁹. In particular, the developments in Kosovo, marked by

¹⁶ Danka Dragić, "Times of Anger and Memories in Romania. Danger of Great Expectations", *Politika. The International Weekly*, year I, no. 41/42, December 29, 1990 – January 11, 1991.

¹⁷ Milan Andrejevich, "Iliescu's Visit: The Issue of Romania's Yugoslav Minorities", *Report on Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, no. 38, September, 21, 1990, 29.

¹⁸ Andrejevich, "Iliescu's Visit: The Issue of Romania's Yugoslav Minorities", 30.

¹⁹ The greater part of the Romanian minority living in the territory of Yugoslavia is concentrated in the Serbian Banat which along with the Bačka and Srem regions form the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, in the Republic of Serbia. According to the census of 1991, in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

growing tensions between the Serbian and Albanian populations and the hard line adopted by the Belgrade authorities in this matter, determined Bucharest to intensify its diplomatic activity in order to protect the Romanian minority in Yugoslavia, most of which are clustered in the region of Vojvodina in northern Serbia. Also, political infighting, especially those worn between centripetal and centrifugal forces within the federation, the unpredictability of the democratization process of the political system and the results of economic reform currently under way, were issues that could affect not only Yugoslav society but the situation of the Romanian minority as well.

Against this background, the issue of minorities – a taboo topic under the Tito and Ceaușescu regimes – will be, as a result of the political changes in both countries, reincorporated into the dialogue between Bucharest and Belgrade²⁰.

The first Romanian-Yugoslav contacts were established immediately after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime when, in December 1989, the Yugoslav Deputy Foreign Minister, Ilija Djukić, visited Bucharest where he met with president Ion Iliescu and submitted the official support of Yugoslavia for the National Salvation Front²¹. This support was strengthened by the establishment, on December 27, 1989, by a group of Serbian intellectuals, led by Veljko Unipan and Miodrag Milin, of the Democratic Front of Serbs in Romania, which joined the National Salvation Front actions²². This initiative was followed

there were 42.386 registered citizens of Romanian nationality, a percentage representing 0.4 percent of the total population. In the province of Vojvodina, where 26 nations, national minorities and ethnic groups lived together, Romanians constituted 1.9 percent of the total population. According to the 1991 census, 90 percent of Romanian inhabitants of Vojvodina lived dispersed in 10 communes of the province, as follows: Alibunar (8467 inhabitants), Vrsac (8058), Pancevo (5003), Covaci (2674) Jitiște (2552), Cuvin (1722), Biserica Albă (1605), Plandiște (1404), Seciani (811), Paul Gătăianțu, Comunitatea Românilor din Iugoslavia (1990-1995), (Novi Sad: Libertatea, 1996), 7 -9.

²⁰ The minority question was, moreover, a priority for Yugoslavia not only in its diplomatic relations with Romania but with its other neighbors as well. The official position of Belgrade in this matter, expressed by the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the SFRY Assembly, pointed out that "the respect for minority rights is an integral part of the civilizational achievements, democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights and is one of the basic indicators of the democratic nature of the socio-political system of any country". Consequently, "the basic objectives and activities of Yugoslavia relative to Yugoslav minorities in neighboring countries are directed to ensure recognition, respect and promotion of their right to freely express their cultural and national identity, to not be discriminated against politically, economically and culturally and to not be subjected to a policy of national assimilation", Aleksandar Somović, "New Dynamism of Yugoslav Foreign Policy", *Review of International Affairs*, vol. XLII, no. 978, January 5, 1991, 5.

²¹ Milutin Milenković, "Romania, Greece", *Politika. The International Weekly*, year. I, no. 10, May 26 – June 1, 1990.

²² Ljubivoje Cerović, *Sârbii din România. Din evul mediu timpuriu până în zilele noastre*, translation from the Serbian language by Ivo Muncian, (Timișoara: Uniunea Sârbilor din România, 2005), 168.

on December 29, 1989, by the establishment of the Democratic Union of Serbs in Romania²³.

These actions were followed by the visit to Bucharest, on April 2, 1990, of the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Budimir Lončar and the visit on May 9 of Romanian Prime Minister Petre Roman to Belgrade, which relaunched the good neighborly relations and cooperation between Romania and Yugoslavia. Starting with the first contacts, the minority issue received a prominent status in the discussions. Following the talks on the subject, the Yugoslav press noted that the Romanian leaders were „receptive” to the Yugoslav side’s evocation of „the years of neglect, even misbehavior” to which the Serb minority and other Yugoslav minorities in Romania were subjected to²⁴.

Similarly, during the official visit to Yugoslavia in September 1990 of president Ion Iliescu²⁵ – the first state visit by a Romanian president after the revolution and the only one made by the Romanian president in 1990 – the discussion on minorities was given, at the proposal of the Yugoslav side, a crucial importance.

The minority issue was the main topic of discussion both during the meeting between president Iliescu and the Serb leaders and in the talks with Croatian president Franjo Tuđman.

Thus, on September 5, Ion Iliescu met for nearly two hours with Franjo Tuđman. The Croatian Radio announced a day after the meeting that Tuđman was primarily interested in improving the position of the Croatian minority in Romania and that Ion Iliescu described

²³ Through the Statute of the Democratic Union of Serbs in Romania (DUSR), adopted at its meeting on February 19, 1990, the DUSR was declared a public organization with a cultural, artistic, literary and instructive character. Its objectives sought the revival of the cultural and artistic organizations in Timișoara and in other cities with Serbian and Croatian population and the establishment of other similar groups in all localities where conditions permitted. Among the stated purposes of the Union were mentioned the promotion of authentic literary creations in the mother language, the extension of the study of the native language from pre-primary units to higher education, the renewal of foundations, creating relationships with the homeland in order to become an important bridge of good neighborly relations and friendship between Romania and Yugoslavia, minority representation at various levels and care for the specific problems of various Yugoslav nationalities and their proper resolution, Ibid, 169.

²⁴ Milenković, "Romania, Greece". Subsequently, *Declarația Parlamentului României la împlinirea a 50 de ani de la Dictatul de la Viena*, adopted by the Romanian Parliament at its meeting on August 29, 1990, by unanimous vote, will provide an official recognition of this fact, stating that "especially during the 80s, (...) minorities have been subjected to a systematic program of removing moral and historical values defining their national identity", see Monitorul Oficial no. 103 from August 30, 1990, "Declarația Parlamentului României la împlinirea a 50 de ani de la Dictatul de la Viena", issuer the Romanian Parliament.

²⁵ During the visit, held between 3 and 5 September 1990, the first and last official talks were held by the Romanian president with Borisav Jović, president of the SFRY Presidium. Also, the Romanian president held talks with the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Ante Marković, the president of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, and the president of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman.

further steps to „secure conditions for the equal development of the political, social and spiritual life of all its citizens”²⁶.

The day before, Ion Iliescu had met with Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and Milenko Lukin, president of the Alliance of Serbs in Romania, to discuss the situation of the Serbs in Romania. Following the talks, president Iliescu said that democratic change „paved the way for major changes regarding the position and rights of the Serb minority, including the preservation of Serbian cultural traditions”. During the meeting, described by Radio Belgrade as „long” and „cordial”, the Serbian government stressed that Romania is expected to protect and restore the Serbian cultural monuments and develop schools, libraries and other cultural institutions of all Yugoslav minorities²⁷.

The interest for tackling the minority issue during the Iliescu-Milošević and Iliescu-Tuđman discussions was most likely stimulated by the fact that in early August, the Croatian government had put forward the idea of conducting negotiations with the Romanian state regarding the relocation to the Istria Peninsula of more than 20.000 Croats living in Romania. The Serbian government had made a similar proposal regarding the relocation of some 50.000 Serbs from the Romanian Banat to Kosovo²⁸.

Overall, the Yugoslav side positively appraised the policy of the new political leadership in Bucharest towards the Serb and Croat minorities living in the territory of the Romanian state²⁹ and the three-day visit to Belgrade of president Ion Iliescu was seen by both sides as the beginning of a new era in Romanian-Yugoslav relations³⁰.

The minority issue will also be included on the agenda of the discussions conducted during the visit to Belgrade, in March 1991, of the Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Nastase³¹. On this occasion, the emphasis will be placed on the situation of the Romanian minority living in Yugoslavia, significant in this respect being the meeting between the

²⁶ Andrejevich, „Iliescu’s Visit: The Issue of Romania’s Yugoslav Minorities”, 30.

²⁷ Andrejevich, „Iliescu’s Visit: The Issue of Romania’s Yugoslav Minorities”, 30

²⁸ Andrejevich, „Iliescu’s Visit: The Issue of Romania’s Yugoslav Minorities”, 30

²⁹ „Visit of the President of Rumania, Jon Iliescu, to Yugoslavia”, *Yugoslav Survey*, vol. XXXII, no. 1, 1991, 150. Aleksandar Prlja, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in an analysis of Serbian foreign policy, noted that “the talks held in Belgrade by the Romanian President Iliescu and Prime Minister Roman with President Milošević leave no doubt that the future Romanian-Serbian relations (usually placed in the general framework of the Romanian-Yugoslav relations) will be considerably more cordial, sincere and better than they were during Ceausescu. This can already be felt in the treatment of the Serbian minorities and other Yugoslav minorities in Romania”, Aleksandar Prlja, “Serbia and the World”, *Review of International Affairs*, vol. XLII, no. 978, January 5, 1991, 7.

³⁰ See the statement made by president Ion Iliescu on his return from the official visit to Yugoslavia in *Rompres, Știri interne*, September 5, 1990, 33-36.

³¹ During his visit, the Romanian Minister held talks with the Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of SFR Yugoslavia, Budimir Lončar, the president of the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia, Ante Marković, president of SFRY Presidium, Borisav Jović, and the president of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević.

Romanian foreign minister and the representatives of the Romanian community in Yugoslavia, Paul Gătăianțu, president of the community, and Ion Marcovicean, vice-president.

During the talks – the first at this level, after the Second World War, between the political leadership of Romania and the representatives of the Romanian minority in Yugoslavia – priority was addressed to the issue of giving support for the education and culture of the Romanian minority in Yugoslavia³² and, in particular, for the minorities living in the Timoc Valley. The representatives of the Romanian community expressed their willingness to work with ethnic Romanian-speakers – Vlachs, Aromanians – living in Yugoslavia, a particular concern being shown towards the Vlachs in the Timoc region, who, as estimated by the minority representatives, numbered between 300 and 400 thousand people. Although most Vlachs regarded themselves as a distinct nation and demanded independence as a people there were, however, entire villages where the Vlachs declared themselves as being Romanians and these people wished the establishment of a cultural center in Vrsac³³.

Regarding education, the representatives of the Romanian community expressed their desire for the reestablishment of the V to VIII classes in the Romanian villages from the Vrsac county, the creation of seminars for teachers in Romania as well as the mutual recognition of diplomas³⁴. Another proposed measure aimed at preventing the transfer of Romanian students to Serbian classes and the establishment of a newspaper to deal with these issues, the current journal of the Romanian minority, „Libertatea” (Freedom), being, according to the representatives of the Romanian community, controlled by the Belgrade regime³⁵. Relative to this last issue, Adrian Năstase proposed the acquisition of a printer

³² The Community of Romanians in Yugoslavia (CRY) was founded at Coștei, on November 24, 1990, and was officially registered in December 28, 1990, at the Federal Secretariat for Justice and Administration in Belgrade. The Statute of the association stated in Article 1: "The Community of Romanians in Yugoslavia is a social and cultural organization of Romanians that may include other citizens of Yugoslav origin, regardless of nationality, religion, social origin, who have a democratic political orientation and who unite in order to achieve the constitutional rights in the sphere of culture, education, media, religion and other domains that arise from this Statute and related to the Romanian national identity", see full text of the Statute in Gătăianțu, op. cit., 100-105.

³³ See the notes of the conversation held on March 8, 1991, between Adrian Năstase and the representatives of the Romanian community in Yugoslavia, Paul Gătăianțu, president of the community, and Ion Marcovicean, vice president, in Adrian Năstase, *România după Malta. 875 de zile la Externe*, vol. 4 (1 martie-30 aprilie 1991), (Bucharest: Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2007), 41.

³⁴ Ibid, 39. These issues will be discussed by the representatives of the minorities and the leadership of the Ministry of Education of Romania, during the first visit of a CRY delegation to Bucharest, held from 9 to 12 April 1991, see Gătăianțu, op. cit., 82.

³⁵ Năstase, *România după Malta. 875 de zile la Externe*, vol. 4, 2007, 40.

for the Romanians in Yugoslavia. Also, he suggested organizing meetings between the representatives of Serbs and Croats in Romania with the Romanian minorities in Yugoslavia, during which the status of minorities would be discussed. Such meetings would have had to take place with the participation of the authorities of the two countries³⁶.

The Romanian side showed, however, considerable caution in tackling the minority issue. In this sense, the Romanian Foreign Minister suggested to his Yugoslav counterpart Budimir Lončar that the problems arising from this topic should be dealt with between governments and not by going directly to the minorities. In particular, the interest showed by the representatives of the Romanian community towards the Vlachs, who were not officially recognized by Belgrade, was regarded with suspicion by the authorities and the Yugoslav press. Paul Gătăianțu showed, in this respect, that the newspaper „Borba” had accused him of wanting to create „România Mare” (Greater Romania) and cause difficulties for the Serbs³⁷. At the same time, in light of the problems faced by the Romanian leadership regarding the treatment of the Hungarian minority in Romania, Bucharest wanted the situation of the minorities in the two countries to be given as an example of European standards, where the problem of minorities would not be used for political purposes³⁸. In this respect, Bucharest needed Belgrade’s cooperation and goodwill.

The overlapping interests and vision between Belgrade and Bucharest regarding the minority question will be visible, during this period, not only in the realm of bilateral relations but also within the framework of concerted actions, at the level of regional cooperation. The question of minorities, regarded as „a barometer of relations between the Balkan states”³⁹, was widely discussed during the second meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Balkan States, held in Tirana in October 1990. Budimir Lončar, the Yugoslav foreign minister, warned during the talks that „no state is devoid of minorities and therefore has no right to ignore the problems and needs that they have”⁴⁰.

³⁶ Năstase, *România după Malta*. 875 de zile la Externe, vol. 4, 2007, 40

³⁷ Năstase, *România după Malta*. 875 de zile la Externe, vol. 4, 2007, 41

³⁸ See the notes of the conversation held on March 8, 1991, between Adrian Năstase and Budimir Lončar, Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of SFR Yugoslavia, in *Ibid*, 50.

³⁹ The expression belongs to the Albanian ambassador in Belgrade, Kujtin Hysenaj, see his statement in Kujtin Hysenaj, "Minorities Barometer in Relations", *Politika*. The International Weekly, year I, no. 32, October 27 – November 2, 1990.

⁴⁰ See the Yugoslav Foreign Minister’s speech in Budimir Lončar, "The Europeanization of the Balkans", *Review of International Affairs*, no. 974, November 20, 1990, 13.

Budimir Lončar served as foreign minister of Yugoslavia between December 31, 1987 and December 12, 1991.

At the same time, the Romanian policy makers' concern with the issue of minorities was highlighted at the meeting by two proposals put forward by the Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Nastase, both supported by Yugoslavia⁴¹. The first proposition envisaged the creating of a „Code of Cooperation” of the Balkan states on issues related to national and ethnic minorities. This code was to establish, in a precise legal language, a set of rules and principles that would guide the states' behavior in promoting solutions to these problems⁴². Second, the Romanian delegation proposed the establishment of a Balkan Institute for Research and Documentation on ethnic and national minorities issues, „able to provide information on government data and the actual political, economic, social and cultural situation of ethnic and national minorities and recommend solutions to be adopted at government level”⁴³.

CONCLUSION

In the interval between the Romanian Revolution and the triggering of the dissolution process of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the minorities problem was, within the context of the Romanian-Yugoslav relations in this period, a central topic of debate. Freed from the constraints of the communist ideological discourse, the Romanian-Yugoslav dialogue successfully reincorporated the subject of minority rights, making it a powerful galvanizing factor which, in contrast to the tensions it created in the diplomatic relations of the two countries with other neighboring countries, contributed significantly to the strengthening of the good neighborly relations between Romania and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

⁴¹ See the notes of the Balkan Ministerial Conference plenary, chaired by Reis Malile, Foreign Minister of Albania, in Adrian Năstase, *România după Malta. 875 de zile la Externe*, vol. 1 (28 iunie-30 octombrie 1990), (Bucharest: Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2006), 626.

⁴² See the Romanian Foreign Minister's speech in Adrian Năstase, "A Turning Point in Europe's History", *Review of International Affairs*, no. 974, November 20, 1990, 15.

⁴³ Năstase, "A Turning Point in Europe's History", 16.

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