Regionalization and historical–cultural dimension of Northwest Romania

Brie, Mircea and MÉSZÁROS, Edina Lilla

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Mircea BRIE
Edina Lilla MÉSZÁROS

Abstract. *The present article tackles a very actual and heavily debated topic in our country, that of the regionalization. Our aim is to present how the memory of belonging to a historical region, the ethnical criteria, the local/regional identity and pride influence the outlining of the regionalization projects from the North–West Region of Transylvania. As a case study we have chosen to unfold the regionalization initiatives which target the North–West Region due to its unique character, being an administrative unit, which during history formed part of a multiethnic province with many autonomous regions. In order to better understand the current decentralization projects of various political parties we have considered also necessary to present the historical regions, ethnical– and administrative territorial configuration of Transylvania throughout the centuries. We wish to prove that despite the devices used in the regionalization process, stating that its role is purely economic reality shows that neither the ethnical nor the historical criteria can be neglected in case of Transylvania, an extremely heterogonous region with strong regional identities.*

Keywords: Regionalization, decentralization, historical region, Partium, Crişana, Banat, Maramureş, administrative unit

Mircea Brie, Associate Professor of International Relations and European Studies at the University of Oradea, Romania, has conducted extensive research within the fields of International Relations, minorities issues, intercultural dialogue and European demography. He has authored six books, has edited eleven other collective volumes, and has published more than 70 articles and studies. The most recent book is *Diplomacy and International Relations in Europe (17th–18th centuries)* (Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2014). E–mail: briedri@hotmail.com

Mészáros Edina Lilla is currently doing her PhD. studies at the Babeş–Bolyai University from Cluj–Napoca and she's also a part time university assistant at the Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Sciences of Communication at the University of Oradea, Romania. Her main research topics include: security studies, border security, European institutions and decision–making, international conflict analysis. E–mail: edina_lilla@yahoo.com

Regionalization of Romania is a widely debated topic that has been dominating the headlines recently. An ambiguous project, with a myriad of different contradictory proposals from political parties, public figures, academics etc., with a finality that is still unclear aims at the administrative decentralization of the country. The argument most frequently used by the political elite to support the regionalization is economic, citing the positive example of Poland, the country in which the implementation of a series of radical reforms managed the transition from the administrative system inherited from the socialist regime to a decentralized system.[1] The famous scientist Francis Fukuyama considers the political, economic, and administrative transformations of Poland as a true "*miracle*".[2]

On the other hand, the process of regionalization may also aim to implementing a wide range of objectives with perspectives varying from historical, to social, cultural, or institutional, its implementation being often justified in the current public debate by the need to apply the regional policy of the European Union, with a particular importance put on the absorbency capacity.[3]

In Romania the decentralization process begins after the fall of communism in 1991 with the adoption of the new Constitution. The Constitution laid the foundation for the establishment of new administrative structures and recognized the coming into existence of the local public administration "*based on the principle of decentralization*" (art. 119) and as "*autonomous authorities*" (Art. 120 para. 2).[4] Since 1991 a variety of legal provisions have been developed, some aimed at decentralization while others have increased control of the central public authorities over the functions of the local public authorities. Despite these measures, the Romanian administrative system continues to remain highly centralized. According to analysts, this Romanian centralism is a result not only of communist specific practices but also specific to the interwar period within the Old Kingdom.[5] The lack of well–established rules on the transfer of powers from central government to local authorities has contributed to[6]:

- administrative fragmentation
- considerable influence of representatives of central authority over local government activity
- unclear role of regional development in the decentralization process
- transferring certain responsibilities to local government without the funding resources
- reduce own revenue of local government, the structure of transfers system
- lack of an integrated vision of decentralization in policy formulation
- lack of correlation of the administrative responsibilities transfer with the financial resources, the initiatives
- lack of coordination between ministries, lack of transparency and predictability of the system of financing local budgets

It can be said that by regionalization it is sought to build new administrative structures that will include several counties, the process of administrative and financial decentralization together with the regionalization has already been included in the Government Programme 2013–2016. According to government representatives, the regionalization is essential and cannot be delayed and our country must overcome the gap that places her behind the rest of Europe, and implementing the principle of subsidiarity must bring public services and decisions closer to citizens with a more efficient management of existing local and government resources as well as the European programmes.[7]

The mass media circulates many myths and concerns about the process, some talk about the fact that regionalization will lead to the *federalization of Romania*, others are concerned about an *increased bureaucracy and costs for the citizens*. From the summary of speeches given by illustrious participants (historians, geographers, economists, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists, philologists and shapers of public opinion from Romania, Moldova, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Poland, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Bulgaria) at the conference titled *Regionalism and Regionalization in Romania. Historical Interpretations and Contemporary Challenges* conducted in May of this year in Iaşi, it is obvious the concern that these cross–county administrative structures arising from regionalization will not simplify the administrative process but rather unnecessarily complicate it at the local level, adding extra obstacles and barriers between citizens and state institutions. According to these scholars, the process of regionalization can be justified only if it the double bureaucracy is eliminated and the counties disappear, and part of its powers transferred to the regions, and part to the communes.[8] The decentralization project militants are seeking to disperse these myths stating that the "*bureaucracy will be simplified, and the services will be brought closer to the citizen. Through decentralization, for certain services, all approvals that used to be obtained in Bucharest will now be obtained at the regional level. All services that needed approval at the county level shall remain either county or local. Basically, the bureaucracy is cut down and therefore the costs incurred by the citizens.*"[9]

It is unknown whether these myths are to become true or not in the future, but one thing is certain, namely that European experiences have demonstrated greater resistance of decentralized democratic states to socio–economic crisis, they reacting more efficiently to emergency situations also. So, to have a decentralized administrative and financial system in our country it is considered necessary to redistribute competences between central and local municipalities and giving communes and regions administrative and financial powers, especially in areas of local/regional areas of interest.[10]

The decision makers in Bucharest consider either ethnicity or history irrelevant to the delimitation of regions; the intrinsic regionalization purpose is to increase economic and social development of the regions. In our opinion, however, the contemporary Romania is clearly marked by the existence of historical dividing lines, consequential to geographical boundary lines, elements that are essential in maintaining the territorial balance.

"From a geographical perspective, the region acts as junctions interwoven and linked hierarchically, polarizing spaces physically heterogeneous but anthropogenic convergent,"[11] and the historical region designates a region with special features of historical development, prior embodying a state or territorial unit[12]. Regional or local identity, which refers to the act of identifying with a particular geographical region of the nation, a result of spatial and shared historical memories, are not to be neglected. By this we mean that indeed the regionalization process should not be done on ethnic or historical criteria, or should not be derived from political interests; nevertheless, the establishment of boundaries and regional decision centres should exclude purely geometric criteria. We believe that the process of regionalization in Romania should be done in such a way as to meet the geographic particularities together with the existing traditions and identities, inheritance of ancient historical regions. The Romanian space can be divided into several key areas and these in turn can be used to establish administrative boundaries or may be divided according to dimensional or identity criteria.

In this paper we want to reveal how the memory of belonging to a historical region, the ethnical criteria, the identity and the regional/local pride influence shaping regionalization projects in Northwest Transylvania. As a case study we chose to present the regionalization initiatives for the Northwest Region due to its uniqueness, being a politico–administrative unit which throughout history has been part of a multi–ethnic province with many autonomous regions.

Historical regions, administrative structures and ethnic groups from Northwest Transylvania: brief historical examination

Transylvania is a historical region and an ethnic mosaic whose administrative organization, from creation, has expressed a continuing tendency of various ethnic and confessional groups to preserve some autonomy, whether in relation to state authority or to delineate between them. This desire to maintain autonomy contributed to the formation of ethnic autonomous territorial entities such as the Romanian districts, the counties (dominated mostly by the ethnic Hungarian element), the Saxon and Székely seats.[13]

The specific geographical–historical provinces analysed in this paper are Banat (with the counties of Caraş Severin, Timiş and Arad), Crişana (with Bihor County) and Maramureş (with the counties of Maramureş şi Satu–Mare), these representing the geographical–historical provinces of the west and northwest of our country.[14]

Anonymus, Notary of King Béla III of Hungary in his Gesta Hungarorum (The Deeds of the Hungarians) makes for the first time a detailed description of the political organizations in Transylvania of the tenth century and early eleventh century, recalling the three political formations (three duchies/principalities), namely: one in the area of *Crişana*, comprising the territory between the rivers Someş and Mureş, under the rule of Menumorut and the capital at the citadel of Biharea; another in *Banat*, with the territory between Mureş and the Danube, having Glad as leader and the capital at the citadel of Cuvin between Timiş and the Danube; finally, one in *Transylvania proper*, stretching from the gates of Meseş to the springs of Someş, being led by Gelu which had its headquarters near Cluj. As described by Anonymus, these three political formations were led by so–called *dukes*, or strong voivodes with own army composed of peasants from rural communities. All these dukes tried to resist their subjugation by Magyar tribes, but their attempts turned out unsuccessful as these regions fell into the hands of Hungarian princes.[15] The penetration of Hungarian Transylvania begins in the tenth century and ends in the thirteenth century, and Kurt Horedt's opinion the conquest of Transylvania was performed in 5 stages: around the year of 900 up to Someşul Mic River, around the year of 1000 the Valley of Someşul Mic and the middle and lower courses of the Mureş to Tîrnava Mare around the year 1100, to the Olt line around the year 1150 and around 1200 up to the

Carpathians.[16] If we analyse the territorial administrative structure of Transylvania from this period we find that this was done on the one hand by creating autonomous and privileged social–territorial entities of the Hungarian nobility, of the Saxons and of the Székely, with the right to be represented in so–called class assemblies (congregations), and on the other hand by limiting or annihilating the political–territorial autonomy organized and maintained by the Romanians, who had no right to participate in the congregation like the representatives of other groups.[17] The Hungarian Kingdom wanted to strengthen its rule in Transylvania by settlement of peoples such as the Szecklers, the Saxons and the Teutonic Knights by dividing the territory in counties dominated by the Hungarian ethnic element in Székely and Saxon seats, and not least in Romanian counties. By placing allogeneic groups, puppets and support pillars for the royalty, due privileges and allocation of estates given to them by the central government, it was sought to abolish the old institutions of the Romanian native population. As mentioned above, Transylvania was divided into noble counties whose leading forum consisted of a commit appointed by the voivode, a vicecommit appointed by the commit, two magistrates for the nobles each and six assessors–jurors also elected from among the nobles. Here should be mentioned the counties of the voivodship (Solnocul Interior, Dăbâca, Cluj, Turda, Alba, Hunedoara and Târnave), the western counties (Satu–Mare, Crasna, Solnocul de Mijloc and Solnocul Exterior, Bihor, Zarand, Arad), Maramureş County, Banat County (Timiş, Cenad, Caraş, Torontal).[18] An interesting thing is that in the first half of the twelfth century the only documented county is that of Bihor, created in 1111, all the other counties are referred to only in the second half of the century.

At the beginning of the tenth century the Szecklers, a people of Turkic origin (Turanic) were settled in Crişana, the so–called *end of the country,* in order to defend the country's borders. Later, when the Kingdom of Hungary succeeds to conquer all Transylvania in the twelfth century the Szecklers are settled on the Mureş and Târnave, and in the thirteenth century in the southeast corner of the voivodship where they live today.[19] In return for fulfilling this role as border guards they received significant privileges from the Hungarian kings. It is these collective rights in exchange for safekeeping of the borders gave the Székely a kind of noble status, playing an important role in forming a heightened self–consciousness, finally becoming the most important criterion for differentiation from other Hungarians.[20] Since the fourteenth century the territorial divisions assigned to the Székely are named seats (sedes), the documents listing seven Székely seats: Odorhei (initially under the name of Telegd), Mureş, Ciuc, Arieş, Sepsi, Kézdi, Orbó.[21]

Saxon settlement begins in the middle of the twelfth century during the reign of Géza II, mostly settling initially in Orăştie–Baraolt strip. By Saxon colonization the central government aimed to increase the number of contributors and to have a more effective defence of Transylvania, sealing the southern and the northern borders.[22] the Golden Bull of Andrew II dated 1224 granted the Saxons special rights for the so–called land of Sibiu, making it the first province colonized by them. This *fundus regius* (royal, regal territory) was self–administered and led by a royal judge initially appointed by the king but later elected, means a separation of *comitatens* system, translating into a greater independence of the Saxons.[23]

Among the administrative–territorial forms of Transylvania we find Romanian districts, relatively well defined geographical areas, most of them being the cores of old political formations where the Romanian population managed to remain predominant. The free peasantry formed the so–called Romanian village communities led a fierce battle against the organization of the county nobility. Some village communities are documented in areas like Banat, Arad region, in the early years of the thirteenth century. Also in the Banat, next to Zarand, the documents mention in 1240 about 32 such communities. Traces of these communities are found in the fifteenth century, the sources recalling numerous Romanian districts who enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Some strong Romanian rural communities from Ţara Maramureşului managed until mid–fourteenth century to resist the ingress of feudalism. After the year 1300, the Maramureş communities organized in voivodeships and principalities on the valleys of Vişeu, Iza and Mara Rivers went on fighting against the organization of the noble county. The village communities are attested in other parts of Transylvania, as well: Alba, Dobâca and Bihor but here, the royal, noble and clerical feudal offensive was stronger.[24] Of the 60 Romanian districts known today 33 were in the region of Banat, the most important Banat districts being: Iliada, Almăj, Sebeş, Caran, Caraşova, Bârzava, Comiat, Lugoj and Mehadia. According to sources, these Banat districts enjoyed greater autonomy than other Romanian entities, having their ancient liberties recognized and confirmed by royal privilege dating 1457, a reward for the Romanian princess' and nobles' bravery in fighting the Ottomans.[25]

Statistics show that from a religious perspective during the fourteenth century 40% of Transylvanian population were Catholic (including Hungarians, Saxons and Szecklers) and almost 60% were Orthodox, i.e. the Romanian population.[26] The Italian Antonio Bonfini's reports tell us that around 1380 almost two thirds of the multi–ethnic Hungarian Kingdom was composed of non–Catholics. In Transylvania, Banat, Crişana şi Maramureş with the predominantly Orthodox Romanian population the Catholics number was less than the

kingdom average. Taking into account the statistics found in the papal tithe register during the years 1332–1337 we conclude that the population of medieval Transylvania was in the proportion of 2/3 Romanian and Orthodox, despite some cases of converts to Catholicism.[27]

Analysing the territorial administrative configuration of Transylvania of the fifteenth century we find out that the number of the Saxon seats increased from 7 to 9, plus the seat of Sibiu while the seat of the Székely decreases due to the merger of three seats, which then was called the Three Chairs or Háromszék. The 8 districts of Banat mentioned above we find present in the fifteenth century too. In Bihor and Satu Mare there were two *districtus olahes* mentioned, and only one in Rodna and Cluj. During this period Maramureş was perceived as the strongest Romanian district.[28]

The Voivodeship of Transylvania remained incorporated in the Kingdom of Hungary until 1541, when it gets out from under Hungarian suzerainty. The principality comprised all counties, the Székely and Saxon seats from Transylvania, the Romanian district and the whole Banat until 1552 (when is gradually annexed by the Turks and transformed into a pashalic) and counties in Partium (Satu Mare, Crasna, Solnoc de Mijloc, Solnoc din afară, Bihor, Zarand, Arad and sometimes Maramureş.[29] The Transylvanian Diet had an important role, being the place where the most important issues about foreign and domestic policy of the principality were debated. The Diet gathered representatives of the privileged "three nations"[30] plus official representatives of the four congregations (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Unitarian). The Romanian Orthodox population was entirely excluded from the political life of the principality, being considered **tolerated**, with no civil, political or social rights. This status of tolerated was reminded frequently to the Romanians, a document of 1579 reported that the situation of the Romanian nation depended on the *whim of the prince and citizens* and *(usque ad beneplacitum principium et regnicolarum)* and they will be tolerated only for *the sake of the country* (*propter regni emolumentum*).[31] Against these visible discriminations we cannot talk about ethnic or racial provisions, at the end of the Middle Ages the ethnic consciousness playing a secondary role, being surpassed by political or religious criteria. Through this organization of the Diet the Hungarian nobility, the Szecklers and the Saxons rather wished to exercise political monopoly.

In 1688 Transylvania was occupied by the Habsburg Empire, changing *the wooden yoke with the iron yoke*, and after the Peace of Karlowitz in 1699 is embedded in the empire. After 1690 in addition to Transylvania, Hungary is also incorporated into the Habsburg Empire, and being motivated by the desire to restore the ancient kingdom of Saint Stephen, initiated a series of pressures to extend the power of Hungarian institutions in the Transylvanian counties, covering: Maramureş, Satu–Mare, Crasna, Zarand, Bihor, Arad (parts of Partium annexed to Transylvania). The Viennese rule supported the Hungarian actions in the detriment of the Romanian principality and the people who continued to be oppressed by the central government just like during the feudal Hungarian Kingdom. Emperor Joseph I allows Maramureş, with Chioar, Solnocul de Mijloc, Crasna şi Zarand to remain under the fiscal administration of the Gubernium of Transylvania, but politically under the tutelage of Hungary.

During the reign of Charles VI in 1732 Arad and Maramureş are annexed to Hungary, and later the same fate is shared by Zarand, Solnocul de Mijloc, Crasna and Chioar. In the high political circles there were serious debates about the membership of the Partium region, the ongoing attempts of the Hungarian officials to seize the initial Partium resulted in failure, being rejected by the government of Transylvania until 1867 when Transylvania was annexed to Hungary.[32] Under Emperor Joseph II Transylvania knew more radical administrative reforms. The number of territorial units is reduced from 29 to 10 then to 11 counties, unitary systematized and grouped into three districts: Cluj, Sibiu, Făgăraş, led by royal commissioners. Banat, starting 1778, was administered by the Hungarian Locumtenential Council, a year later was divided into three counties: Caraş, Timiş, Torontal.[33] The revolution of 1848–49 brought no significant changes to the administrative–territorial structure, the Székely seats being replaced by counties. In 1849 by the Viennese government decision Banat is constituted into a separate province, under the name of *Serbian Vojvodina and Timişoara Banat*, with the residence at Timişoara, Maramureş and Crişana remain in the composition of Hungary.[34] According to the statistician Söllner, in 1844 Transylvania housed 1.291 million Romanians, 606,000 Hungarian and Székely and 214,000 Germans. Söllner included in his statistics also the counties Solnocul de Mijloc, Crasna, Zărand, the District of Chioar, regions that back then formed the land Partium, with a predominantly Romanian population of 164,000 against the 62,000 Hungarians. According to the statistics, 60 % of the inhabitants of Transylvania were Romanians, while the Hungarians totalled almost 29 %. Söllner's data were broadly confirmed by the census done by the Austrian authorities in 1850 that showed the distribution of the population as follows:

Table 1. Ethnical composition of Transylvania in 1850

| Romanians | 1.227.000 | 59.6% |

Hungarian, Székely	536.000	26.1%
Saxons	192.500	9.3%
Gipsy	79.000	3.8%
Jews	15.500	0.7%
Armenians	7.600	0.3%
Slavs	3.700	0.2%
Other nationalities	700	
Total	2.062.200	100%

Source: Constantin Daicoviciu et al., *op cit*, p. 341

After 1854, 10 prefectures were organized in Transylvania, in 1861 returning to the old administrative division and county seats. Between 1869–1870 and 1876 there were a series of administrative reforms including the abolition of the old administrative–territorial autonomy of the Székely and Saxon seats together with the border territories. The old counties, districts and seats were replaced with new counties, unitarily organized, with *plăşi* as subdivision. Leading the county was the *supreme commit* (prefect, *fişpan*) appointed by the state and vicecommit (under prefect, *viceşpan*). The Act of 1870 divided the cities into municipalities and towns with councils or magistrate. The cities with the right to municipality had an organization identical to that of the county, but exercised their authority in a smaller territory.[35]

The law of 1876 standardized all administrative–territorial units, leading to a modification in ethnic majorities, the cancellation of Saxon autonomy and the conversion of the Saxon University (Universitas Saxonum) to a merely a cultural institution, limiting the autonomy of *comitatens* by subordination of the central power counties and separation of judiciary power from the executive power.[36] All these territorial administrative measures served only the interests of the Hungarian side, reinforcing centralization and the domination of Hungarian governments at local government level, placing the non–Hungarian ethnic groups (this time in addition to Romanian entered the Saxons) in a position of inferiority. The data provided confirms this assertion, noting that the central government had only 135 Romanian officials besides the 8124 Hungarian officials. The situation was similar in the county: 137 Romanians – 4130 Hungarian officials, while the city officials were formed of 91 Romanian officials (even smaller number) against the 4680 Hungarian officials.[37]

The population of Transylvania, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş in the census of 1870 was of 4,224,614 inhabitants, with a density of 41 inhab/km^2. The next census in 1880 shows that in Transylvania, Banat, Crişana şi Maramureş there were 4,081,662 inhabitants, with a density of 39.7 inhab/km^2.[38] The statistics provided show that the share of Romanian–Hungarian population remains unchangeable in the second half of the nineteenth century, in 1880 the population of Transylvania was formed 1,249,968 (55.9%) of Romanians and only 666,376 (29.8%) of Hungarians.[39]

Table 2. Religious structure of the population in Transylvania, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş in1880

	Number	Percentage
Orthodox	1.504.049	37%
Greek–Catholics	941.474	23,2%
Reformed	510.369	12,6%
Roman–Catholics	716.267	17,6%
Lutherans	220.779	5,5%
Unitarians	55.492	1,4%
Mosaic	107.124	2,6%
Other confessions	4.953	0,1%

Source: Istoria României. Transilvania, Vol. II, Edit. George Bariţiu, Cluj Napoca, 1997, Tabelul nr. 8.

After the Great Union of December 1, 1918 and the entry of Transylvania and in composition of Romania, the decree organizing the province of Transylvania divided the territory into 23 counties: Făgăraş, Sibiu, Hunedoara, Alba, Turda–Arieş, Bistriţa–Năsăud, Târnava–Mare, Târnava–Mică, Mureş–Turda, Cojocna, Solnoc–Dăbâca, Ciuc, Braşov, Trei–Scaune, Sălaj, Sătmar, Bihor, Arad, Maramureş, Bichiş, Cenat, Timiş–Torontal, Odorhei, led by appointed prefects.[40] Between 1925–1940 the boundaries of counties were adjusted, especially those in Transylvania and the eastern part of Torontal, with a Romanian majority, was incorporated in Timiş County.[41] The ethnic structure of Transylvania in the 1930 census states that 57.8 % of the population in Transylvania were Romanians, 31.7 % Hungarians, 9.8 % Germans and other nationalities.[42] The *Law for organizing the local administration promulgated on August 3, 1929* renewed the idea of organizing Romania's territory in 7 *ministerial directorates* named after cities chosen as administrative centres: Bucharest, Chernivtsi, Chişinău, Cluj, Craiova, Iaşi and Timişoara. In Transylvania

there were two directorates; the ministerial directorate with the centre in Cluj included the counties of Sălaj, Sătmar, Maramureş, Someş, Năsăud, Cluj, Turda, Mureş, Ciuc, Three Chairs, Braşov, Făgăraş, Sibiu, Hunedoara, Alba. The ministerial directorate with the centre in Timişoara included the counties of Bihor, Arad, Timiş–Torontal, Severin and Caraş.[43]

After coming to power of King Charles II, by adopting the Constitution of 24 February 1938 another administrative reform took place, laying the foundations of *territorial constituencies*, also known as lands with legal personality, which represented local interests while exercising the powers of general administration. Northwest and West Transylvania formed two provinces, the first one of Someş including Bihor, Sălaj, Satu –Mare, Maramureş, Someş, Năsăud and Cluj, the second Timiş encompassing the counties of Arad, Timiş, Hundeoara, Severin, Caraş.[44] By the Vienna Arbitration of August 30, 1940 Romania loses Northern Transylvania with the cities of Oradea, Cluj– Napoca, Târgu–Mureş. Through the Armistice Convention of September 12, 1944 and through the Peace Treaty of February 10, 1947, Northern Transylvania Romania is brought back into the body of Romania.[45] On January 15, 1949, Law 17 regulates the status of administrative units laying the foundation of a new administrative–territorial form of organization, that of the regions. Northwest Transylvania included the Bihor regions, Baia Mare and Cluj.[46] Since 1968 the territorial administrative units have been the counties and since 1998 8 regions without administrative status have been created and the North–West Development Region includes the counties of Bihor, Satu Mare, Maramureş, Bistrița Năsăud, Sălaj and Cluj.[47]

We can conclude that the administrative reforms of modern times have a double character representing on the one hand, the tendency of the state to restrict the autonomy of the administrative unit, and on the other hand, trying to defend their communities and institutions independent of the central power.

Quo vadis, decentralization? Project of regionalization for the Northwest Region or the case of *"the child lost between the midwives"*

To better understand contemporary decentralization projects of various political parties, academics and public figures it was absolutely necessary to go through a presentation of historical regions, the pattern of ethnic and territorial administrative of Transylvania across centuries. Thus we can understand the motives and the driving forces that lie behind the current policy proposals and decisions. In the following lines we will make a summary of the proposals submitted by the various regions by various political parties, while we try to answer several questions, such as: Why do Romanians fear Hungarians and Hungarians fear Romanians where the regionalization is concerned? How do the parties with Parliament and Government majority want to overlook the requests from the ethnical minorities parties if Romanian is a signatory party to the international treaty that prohibits modification of a state administrative organization, if minorities affected by the change do not agree? How and when the process of regionalization is complete if the political elites do not speak with one voice and are not able to send a consistent message as a draft uniform regionalization project agreed and accepted by all belligerent parties?

Before presenting various projects of regionalization it is important to understand of the concept itself. "*Regionalization is a process through which it is operated the building of a capacity for autonomous action aimed at promoting a subnational area, but at supralocal level by mobilizing economic resources or, where appropriate, of the identity mechanisms of local or regional solidarities together with the development of its potential. This process can be operated from existing institutions or new territorial cut–out designed to better meet these objectives. It is always subject to the constraints exerted by political and institutional frameworks whose outcomes may be governed by other stakes.*"[48] The region is considered as one of the best forms of spatial organization of information in terms of the concept of regionalization. Also, the regionalization can be seen as an increase in societal integration in a given region, including undirected processes of social and economic interaction between units (such as nation–states).[49]

If we look at examples of regionalization of European countries, we find that the regionalization process varies from country to country depending on the organization, the legislative framework, the ethnic component and their historical traditions. Thus we can talk about different types of regionalization. Among them we note the *incorporated regionalization* model used in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a unitary state that has been created by merging several territories that retain some individuality; the *diversified regionalization* model implemented in Belgium, where the administrative structures were determined both by political criterion and linguistic and cultural criteria; the *classical administrative regionalization* model found in France, through the creation of autonomous territorial regions

etc.[50] In the case of our country it is sought to implement a *cooperative regionalization*, with the regions representing institutionalized forms of cooperation between local territorial entities.

If we look at the proposals for optimization of regions of different political parties we realize that there is no consensus today on what should show on the regions of Romania map.

As the map below shows, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) wants a Romania with 10 regions, where the region covered by this paper will bear the name of Northwestern Region and will include th counties of Satu–Mare, Bihor, Sălaj, Cluj, Bistriţa Năsăud and Maramureş.[51]

Map 1. Regionalization Map according to PSD
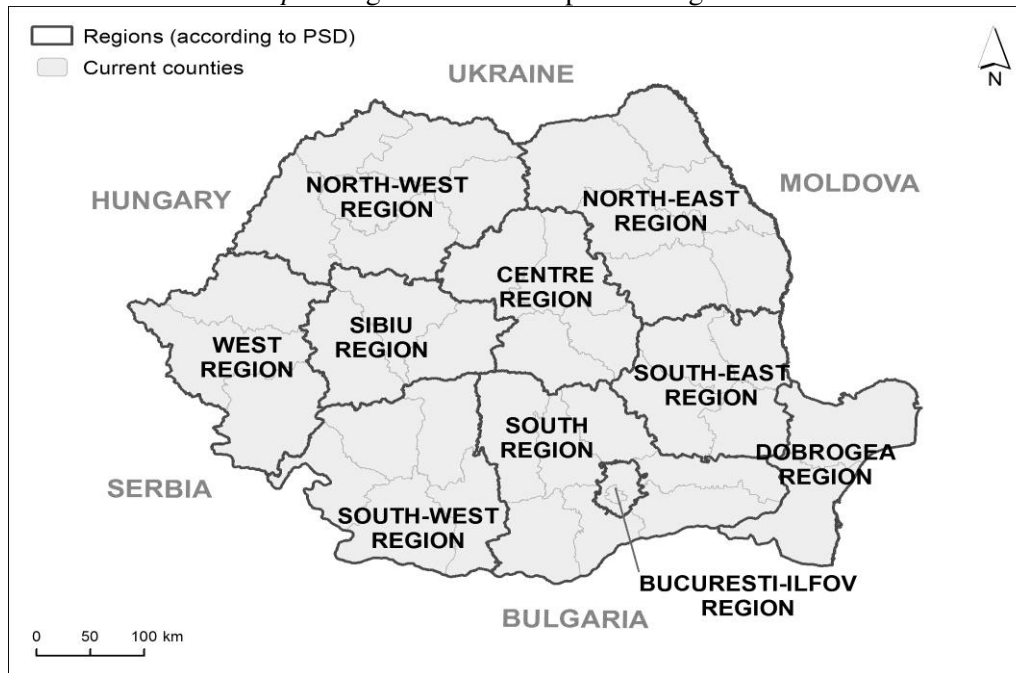
Source: Personal adaptation after Luminiţa Pîrvu, *op. cit.*

The Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) wants to invest the existing eight regions with administrative status by turning them into counties. The Northwest Region would change its name to Crişana County and will include Satu–Mare, Bihor, Sălaj, Cluj, Bistriţa Năsăud and Maramureş with the centre at Cluj–Napoca.

Map 2. Regionalization Map according to PDL
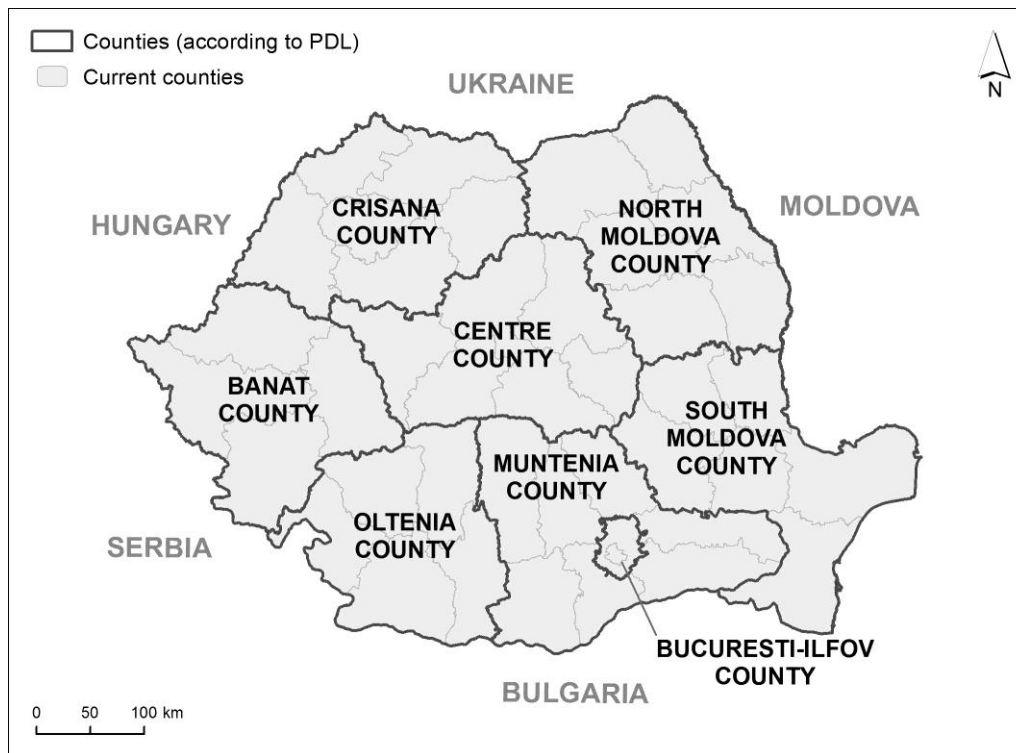
Source: Personal adaptation after Radu Săgeată, *op cit*, p. 34.

Representatives of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) consider creating 5 Macroregions (16 regions) and the politico–administrative individualization of *Széklerland* by unifying the counties with Hungarian ethnic majority (Harghita – 84,61% şi Covasna – 73,81%) with Mureş County (39.26% of the total population is Hungarian), being inspired by the former Hungarian Autonomous Region which operated between 1952 and 1960. They resist the version with the 8 administrative areas overlapping the current development regions initiated by PDL, saying it would lead to increasing economic disparities between counties.[52]

UDMR Deputy Cseke Attila points out that "*the developing regions we have now are too large. The phenomenon is that 1–2 counties develop continuously and the others do not keep up. UDMR proposes a flexible solution with minimum 2, maximum 4 counties in a region.*"[53]

According UDMR leaders in the country's northwest part a territorial assembly should consist of the current counties of Satu Mare (Hungarian population 35.22%), Bihor (25.92%) and Sălaj (23.07%) together with Cluj counties (17.37% Hungarians), Maramureş (9.06%) and Bistriţa–Năsăud (5.89%). Cseke Attila also expressed his agreement regarding the fact that regionalization should not be made on ethnic or historical grounds, but in his opinion, the three counties with a population predominantly Hungarian, Harghita, Covasna and Mures, must use a single region, as it would meet the five criteria set by the European Union.

As already stated above, UDMR propose a variant of regionalization with 16 regions, with the multicultural city of Oradea at the centre of a region formed from Bihor, Sălaj, Satu Mare. In November 2013 at a debate on regionalization organized at Cseke Attila's initiative, presidents of county organizations of parliamentary parties, representatives of Bihor County Council Oradea City Hall, together with the attending Senators and Deputies signed in Oradea a statement (Declaratio ut Varadinum fiat Centrum Regionis) where each promises to support a single version of regionalization with Oradea as the region centre within their own institution and before all central institutions and authorities.

From statements made by the President of Bihor County Council and county organization of PNL, Cornel Popa, we find out that the first steps have already been taken in this regard, he even submitted to his colleagues in the party a proposal with 10 regions, including the regions covered by us: Crişana (with the centre at Oradea, formed of Bihor, Sălaj, Satu–Mare and Maramureş), Transylvania (with the centre at Cluj–Napoca, formed of the counties of Cluj, Alba, Bistriţa Năsăud and Mureş).[54] There are debates between political leaders from Oradea and Satu Mare respectively, the officials in Satu Mare insisting that they will not be part of a region centred at Oradea. They want this function to be performed by Cluj–Napoca.[55]

Map 3. Regionalization according to UDMR

Source: Personal adaptation after Radu Săgeată, *op cit*, p. 36.

As it can be seen from the multitude of projects, opinions and contradictions abound not only between political parties but also between regions in the decentralization process. On the one hand Romanians will not hear of a new territorial assembly that incorporates only counties with a Hungarian population majority, and in turn Hungarians insist that in the process of regionalization cannot get over the historical and ethnic particularities and these counties have be part of the same region, justifying their requirement with economic motives, saying that separating the counties and their incorporation in other administrative structures would lead to serious economic gaps, some counties cannot keep up with the others.

Our country is signatory to an international treaty that prohibits modification of the administrative organization of a state where minorities affected by the change do not agree, therefore we consider it very difficult to successfully complete the process of regionalization if there is no consensus between the warring parties. Despite the slogans used in the regionalization process which want to confirm that its intrinsic purpose is economic development, the reality is that one cannot override ethnic or historical criteria, especially in the case of Transylvania, a historical region extremely heterogeneous with strong regional identities.

The lack of consensus regarding the existence of a number of regions, a clear division of powers, the abundance of proposals, political games fought to maintain power, all turns it into a project that is incoherent, unreliable and with an unknown finality in the eyes of citizens, whose apparent interest was meant to serve. Only time will tell whether regionalization will be implement in Romania and whether it is a viable project, or Shakespeare would say it would only be "*much ado about nothing*".

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