DISSIDENTS AMONG THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN ROMANIA: THE INTERPRETATION AND CREATION OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS, 1977–1989

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about dissidence and dissident figures among the Hungarian minority in state-socialist Romania. Its temporal framework covers1977 to 1989 when the 1975 Helsinki Accords offered an opportunity to the nascent resistance in East-Central Europe to use the human rights language to which, at the same time, the Western media was also receptive. How did dissidents emerge in the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania? I restrict the study to this ethnic group because of its complex situation having a transnational connection to its national homeland and the Hungarian diaspora in the West while under the increasing nationalizing attempts of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in Romania. I draw my methodology from current historiography that argues for a study of dissidence that considers oppositional activities, individual actions, and perception of state-socialist regimes and Western media. In a study of newspapers, letters, pamphlets, reports, and hearings, I offer a complex analysis of dissident activities and their interpretation. Although this is a story on a single Hungarian minority from the region, this thesis argues that ethnic Hungarian oppositional figures had similar characteristics to their colleagues from Czechoslovakia and Poland. Similarly, through Western interpretation, they were depicted as dissident figures. However, Western media's inability to pay attention simultaneously to more than one dissident from a national context and the domestic situation did not allow them to become equally known. For ethnic Hungarian dissidence to become understandable and important in the West, it was necessary for interpretation. An advocacy group, called Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), organized from members of the diaspora, interpreted oppositional activities through transnational networks and cast five dissident actors as dissidents: Károly Király, Géza Szőcs, László Tőkés, and editors of the Hungarian samizdat in Romania, *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*). Their interpretation served as legitimization for both the dissidents and HHRF.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1985 the Hungarian government organized the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Cultural Forum,[1] the first such meeting organized by a Warsaw Pact state. The meeting held in Budapest examined the provisions on the cultural exchange of the famed 1975 Helsinki Accords that allegedly sparked the Eastern European "dissident movement." Hungarian dissidents dissatisfied with the official interpretation of the Hungarian government interpreted culture organized an Alternative Forum where they invited other dissidents from the region, Western intellectuals, and journalists to discuss censorship issues. However, at this great jamboree of oppositional thinkers and Western intellectuals who sympathized with them, ethnic Hungarian dissidents from Romania could not attend because the regime did not allow them to travel. Instead, a New York-based advocacy group for Hungarian minorities, called Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), attended in their stead and transmitted their message.[2]

In addition to being present at the alternative cultural forum, the HHRF also represented ethnic Hungarian dissidents at the official forum. In addition, it was planning a trip for Western writers to visit Transylvania. The trip was eventually canceled. Had it happened, people like Rose Styron, poet and among the founders of Amnesty International U.S.A., Gabi Gleichmann, a Hungarian-Swedish-Norwegian cultural journalist, publisher, and author, and Timothy Garton

[1] The CSCE, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent U.S. government agency created by Congress in 1975 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) commitments. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent U.S. government agency created by Congress in 1975 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) commitments.

[2] Zsolt Csalog, "Beszámoló Az 1985. Őszi Budapesti Kulturális Fórumról" (New York, NY: Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, January 16, 1986), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, CSALOG ZSOLT_BESZAMOLO A KULTURALIS FORUMROL (NOT USED) _11-85. The digital archives of the HHRF consists of files unusually named in a mixture of English and Hungarian. The file names are capitalized, so for the sake of authenticity, I will quote them accordingly.

Ash, who as a journalist "went native" in Eastern Europe and wrote extensively on the dissident figures of the region, would have visited. In addition, the briefing material of the trip made by the publisher of HHRF's clandestine news agency provided the list of ethnic Hungarians whom the HHRF considered dissidents and those whom they considered loyal to the Romanian regime.[3]

The 1985 Budapest Alternative Cultural Forum illustrates that the East-Central European dissident scene showed signs of increased activity and deep entanglements between various national contexts, dissident groups, and actors throughout the 1980s. Multiple scholars conceptualize these entanglements as transnational, arguing that interactions across borders facilitated dissidence in the region. The same transnational approach can be used to understand why second-generation Hungarian Americans, Western intellectuals, and the media were part of the same network with ethnic Hungarian dissidents from Romania. At the same time, transnationality reflects upon how Westerners were involved not just in the facilitation of dissent but also by labeling certain activities and figures as "oppositional," leading to their identification as dissidents. This thesis addresses these multiple concerns and seeks to answer the question: How did Western interpretation help create dissident figures in the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania?

Based on Kacper Szulecki's ideas, I argue that the dissident figure is a Western discursive term for categorizing people involved in a distinct set of activities opposing state-socialist regimes in East-Central Europe.[4] In this thesis, I present a study of how second-generational Hungarian Americans, as part of the Hungarian diaspora in the U.S., were actively involved in creating

[3] Attila Ara-Kovács, "Utazási Javaslat," November 4, 1984, HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, BUDAPEST CULTURAL FORUM TRIP TO TRANSYLVANIA (ABORTED).
[4] Kacper Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22613-8.

dissident figures among the Hungarian minority in Romania through transnational networks. However, compared to previous studies, this thesis goes further in exploring the potential of transnational networks. It argues that diaspora members amplified the ethnic Hungarians' dissent towards Western media and influenced policymakers in U.S. politics and other international forums, such as the CSCE. Furthermore, it argues that diaspora organizations exploited the subject of the Hungarian minority to legitimize their existence.

The period under study is from 1977 until 1989, an interval when the 1975 Helsinki Accords offered the incipient opposition in the region the language of human rights, a language through which the Western media could interpret them.[5] The temporal endpoint refers to the period of regime changes in the region. Although I do not intend to tackle the 1989 regime change in Romania, since that would deserve another thesis, I will assert that the ethnic Hungarians had a unique role in starting the protests against the Romanian regime that culminated in the 1989 Revolution. The geographical focus on Romania aims to counter the frequent scholarly exclusion of the country from studies on dissidence based on claims of the regime's significant dissimilarity from other regimes in the region that either significantly altered the forms and practices of dissent or altogether prevented its prospect.

In this thesis, the Hungarian minority is treated as both agents of transnational dissident and as a discourse subject of this activity. Unlike the Polish dissident case, which occupies a central place in literature, the Hungarian minority in Romania was in a more complicated and contested situation.[6] Apart from the economic crisis and the increased state oppression, the Hungarian

[5] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 13.
[6] Although I acknowledge that following the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947, similarly to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, a significant number of Hungarian communities came under Czechoslovak, Soviet, and Yugoslav rule, this study focuses only on the Hungarian minority in Romania since the prospect of the dissolution of the community overshadowed the problem of other Hungarian minorities.

minority, the most numerous one in the country with a population of more than one and a half million, was subject to nationalizing endeavors from the Romanian state and suffered oppression because of their ethnicity. By the end of the 1980s, even their dissolution became a severe threat as the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu's unfulfilled plan on "systematization," i.e., transforming most villages to sort of "agricultural cities," threatened to liquidate the Hungarian ethnic character of villages (the region where the Hungarians live in the majority is predominantly a rural area).[7]

Moreover, the community became the subject of a heated debate between Romania and Hungary, which ended in a "diplomatic war" between the two state-socialist governments who belonged to the same military alliance. The Hungarian government accused the Romanian one of mistreating the Hungarian minority, while Romania interpreted these accusations as interference in its internal affairs and later as Hungarian revisionism. During the period under discussion, the Hungarian government shifted its approach to the Hungarian minorities. After decades of defensive foreign policy, in the 1980s, many Hungarian intellectuals and diplomatic staff urged the top party leadership to initiate a more active foreign policy on behalf of Hungarians living in the minority. As a result, the Hungarian party leader János Kádár gave a free hand to the foreign affairs apparatus, and from the second half of the 1980s, the Hungarian party leadership openly took a stand on the Hungarian minority. By the time of the "diplomatic war," the Hungarian party leadership and diplomacy saw the solution as reorganization without Ceaușescu.[8]

[7] Csaba Zoltán Novák, *Holtvágányon: a Ceausescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája II. 1974-1989* [*On Dead End: The Policy of the Ceausescu Regime Towards Hungarian Minorities 2. 1974–1989*] (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2017), 35–50.
[8] Ibid., 61–72 and Tamás Kiss and Nándor Bárdi, "Minority Political Agency in Historical Perspective: Periodization and Key Problems," in *Unequal Accommodation of Minority Rights: Hungarians in Transylvania*, ed. Tamás Kiss et al., Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 59.

The primary documents used in this thesis are manifold. I extensively rely on the archives of the HHRF that document a range of their activities during the 1980s. The archives collected the "official representation" of the organization for its audience and the behind-the-scenes documents and HHRF's liaising with many governmental and non-governmental actors around the globe, highlighting the HHRF's role in transnational networks. Of crucial importance are the documentation prepared for U.S. and international policymakers, the letters of ethnic Hungarian dissidents from Romania, and press clippings related to the matter. However, also great importance is given to Radio Free Europe's (RFE) records at the Open Society Archives (OSA) since RFE maintained the most comprehensive private research center in the West concentrated on Soviet, East European, and state-socialist affairs, focusing on dissidence and human rights violation in East-Central Europe.

This thesis aims to show how Western actors created dissident figures in the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Although my study is restricted to this minority, it provides a broader claim about the universalities and particularities of the creation of dissidents. How was a small group of Hungarian Americans able to gather information across borders? What characteristics or acts enabled someone to be identified as a dissident? What strategies did diaspora actors follow to interpret and amplify dissent? In addressing these questions, this thesis argues that the HHRF managed, by gathering and interpreting information on ethnic Hungarian dissent in Romania, helped create four dissident figures in line with Western ideas and make them, with greater or lesser success household names.

CHAPTER 1. Ethnic Minority, Diaspora, Dissidentism, and its Interpretation

The following discussion introduces some of the main theoretical orientations and conceptual tools that the thesis employs. The primary goal of this section is to conceptualize both ethnic minorities and oppositional activities in transnational contexts. First, the chapter discusses the theory of the Hungarian minority in Romania, focusing on its agency and periodizes its history. At the same time, it tackles the difference between ethnic minorities and diaspora communities. Second, the chapter examines theoretical approaches to the main focus of the thesis: dissidence and *dissidentism* relying on transnational networks. Finally, this section will discuss the theory and history of three institutions that were crucial in disseminating and interpreting the dissidence of certain members of the Hungarian minority.

1.1. Ethnic minority vs. Diaspora: Theory and Periodization

1.1.1. Ethnic minority

Since scholars have theorized ethnic minorities in many ways, the thesis limits itself to the subject of its study, the Hungarian minority in Romania and beyond. To this end, it relies on Tamás Kiss's and Nándor Bárdi's argument, which concentrates on the changing forms of Hungarian "minority political agency" in 20th century Romania.[9] In contrast to many accounts that present minorities as subjects of the strategies planned by majority political actors, Kiss and Bárdi focus on the agency of minority groups or (poorly defined) minority elites to influence political processes and the policies concerning the minority.[10] In their understanding, minority political agency

[9] Kiss and Bárdi, "Minority Political Agency in Historical Perspective," 37–70.

[10] The meaning of 20th century "Hungarian minority elites" lacks proper definition in the literature. Bárdi distinguishes five different generations of elites starting from 1920, attributing to them properties that vary from era to era. For the studied period the 4th and 5th generation elites are relevant. The 4th generation elites consisted mostly of first-generation intellectuals receiving some type of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s. They became leading cultural bureaucrats thus being acquainted with the inner working of communist parties in the region. Being co-opted in power structures they tried to advocate for their community from inside. As 5th generation has crucial

manifests itself in ethnic claim-making and institution building. In the Romanian context, ethnic claim-making refers to the Hungarian elites' varying agency to bargain with majority political actors on policy alternatives concerning ethnicity (e.g., language use, national symbols) using formal and informal channels, i.e., petitions and meeting with personal meetings with high-ranking party members. In addition, Kiss and Bárdi argue that minority elites pay permanent attention to institution building since they connect the existence of a dense network of minority institutions with the ethnocultural reproduction of the community.[11] Finally, the authors also consider minority political agency as an arrangement of responsive actions planned to offset the nationalizing endeavors of the state, possessed by the titular group (i.e., Romanians).[12]

Kiss's and Bárdi's notion of "minority political agency" is highly relevant to my analysis since it presents the Hungarian minority in Romania and its elites as active agents that can, or at least try to, influence political processes concerning the minority. Focusing specifically on the 1980s, when the Ceaușescu regime severely restricted the framework of both the ethnic claim-making and institution building, the authors' approach helps to explain why minority elites needed to turn towards various forms of dissent and seek help from dissident movements in Hungary and émigré movements in the West, to sustain the ethnocultural reproduction of their community. In the same period, the Ceaușescu regime's strong activation of nationalizing endeavors further aggravated the task of the elites. Instead of imagining the flow of information from dissident groups, or minority elites, to other groups as a simple end-to-end process, the authors' argument points out the complexity of information production. The Hungarian minority elites had to get

importance in the 1980s, I deal with them in more detail later. See Nándor Bárdi, "Generation Groups in the History of Hungarian Minority Elites," Regio – Minorities, Politics, Society – English Edition VIII, no. 1 (2005): 109–24.)

[11] Kiss and Bárdi, "Minority Political Agency in Historical Perspective," 40.

[12] Ibid. 39.

information to other groups through a complex transnational network to counter the nationalizing state narratives of their home country.

Kiss and Bárdi distinguish four significant periods based on the strategies and possibilities of ethnic claim-making of the Hungarian minority in Romania: the interwar period, during World War II, state socialism, and the period after 1989.[13] Our interest lies in the third period, which one can further divide into three main periods, based on Gábor Vincze's periodization: 1944–1952 (when the state-socialist frameworks of minority policy were established), 1953–1964 (marked by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as the first secretary of the Romanian Communist Party), and 1965–1989 (dominated by Nicolae Ceaușescu).[14] Although the Romanian state initially conceptualized the Hungarian minority as a nationality, "a separate entity from both the national majority and the external homeland,"[15] Kiss and Bárdi argue that within the last period, after 1973, the consequences of the so-called "mini cultural revolution" had a negative impact on the minority policies of the Romanian state as well.[16]

By the 1980s, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania had deteriorated dramatically. While the government's austerity program affected the entire population, the intensification of Romanian nationalism and the human rights violations mainly affected the Hungarian minority. For example, the Securitate (the Romanian secret police agency) increasingly targeted Hungarian intellectuals, conducting house searches and arrests while suppressing most opportunities to exercise freedom of expression. These actions created an environment where the

[13] Kiss and Bárdi, "Minority Political Agency in Historical Perspective," 51–62.
[14] Gábor Vincze, *Történeti kényszerpályák – kisebbségi reálpolitikák II. Dokumentumok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetének tanulmányozásához 1944–1989* [*Historical Forced Trajectories – Minority Real Policies II. Documents for the Study of the History of the Hungarian Minority in Romania 1944–1989*] (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2003), XV–XXVIII.
[15] Kiss and Bárdi, "Minority Political Agency in Historical Perspective," 45.
[16] Ibid., 59.

previously well-functioning Hungarian cultural institutions began to degrade. However, as we will see in later chapters, the biggest threat to human rights came when Ceaușescu's unfulfilled plan on "systematization," i.e., transforming most of the villages to sort of "agricultural cities," was revealed in the middle of the 1980s. Although the plan was not aimed directly at minorities, it threatened to liquidate the Hungarian ethnic character of villages.[17]

The processes started by the "mini cultural revolution" culminated in 1985 when the state began to use the "Romanian of Hungarian nationality" term instead of the Hungarian nationality to refer to community members, signaling a step towards a state's goal to assimilate them. As a result, the minority institutional system vital to the ethnocultural reproduction of the community began to degrade as well. For example, the government gradually curtailed the educational system, while the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) took control over other Hungarian cultural institutions like theatres and the Kriterion Publishing House. In addition, several Hungarian magazines and news outlets were merged or closed. Similarly, the government discontinued television broadcasts in Hungarian and rural radio studios in 1985.[18]

However, the policies of the regime against the Hungarian minority did not go unanswered. Until 1977, the Hungarian elite exclusively tried to alter these policies by ethnic claim-making based on informal channels in the state's power structure. As personal relations and petitioning the government did not yield results, a few people choose to turn towards Western publicity to pressure the government into the desired direction. Nevertheless, ethnic claim-making did not disappear; instead, minority elites supplemented it by turning to the Western public. By the 1980s, a generation of young, university-educated, non-party member elites operated "both inside the

[17] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 35–50.
[18] Ibid., 61–72.

system (in editorial offices and educational institutions), and in separate informal/illegal organizations."[19] This part of the elite relied on transnational networks, including other Hungarian dissident groups of the 1980s. In this way, they could formulate their criticism abroad in Hungarian samizdats or RFE, which provided significant international publicity.[20] The transnational networks were formed through the Hungarians in the neighboring country and the sizeable Hungarian diaspora.

1.1.2. Diasporas

Most of the actors outside Romania, who were involved in promoting the welfare of the Hungarian minority and the interpretation of ethnic Hungarian dissent, were emigres from Transylvania or Hungary. However, this thesis analyzes émigré communities as part of the Hungarian diaspora since the term includes the descendants of emigrants. Although Rogers Brubaker considers Hungarians in Romania as "accidental diasporas," a community that emerged not by the "movement of people across the borders," but due to the "movement of borders across people,"[21] the thesis follows the Hungarian scholarship that separates the diasporas from ethnic minorities. Hungarian scholarship considers diaspora communities as micro-communities who emigrated from their place of origin and integrated into the society surrounding them without assimilation. These communities have a symbolic or objective relationship with related communities living in other areas but are considered to be of the exact origin, with their real or imagined homeland or motherland.[22] Kiss argues that diaspora communities' extensive relations

[19] Bárdi, "Generation Groups," 121.
[20] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 87–92.
[21] Rogers Brubaker, "Accidental Diasporas and External 'Homelands' in Central and Eastern Europe: Past and Present," IHS Political Science Series 71 (October 2000): 2–3
[22] Dániel Gazsó, "Egy definíció a diaszpórakutatás margójára [*A Definition for the Margin of Diaspora Research*]", *Kisebbségkutatás* 14, no. 2 (2015): 11.

with the receiving society give a transnational character that increases the lobbying potential of the community, as we will see in subsequent chapters.[23] We shall add that those diaspora communities were in transnational connection with their receiving society and foster bonds with their homeland's ethnic minority.

Brubaker also draws our attention to the dangers of treating ethnic and national communities as a group, which he coins as "groupism." Instead, Brubaker calls for a rethinking of ethnicity. As we will see in the following, in terms of the diaspora communities, this implies that one should not think of them as a well-defined, specific collective but as a "practical category" that one can use to formulate demands, articulate projects, set expectations, mobilize energies and appeal to loyalties. Brubaker argues that instead of diaspora communities being actors, cultural entrepreneurs take diaspora stands. Therefore, it is more worthwhile to talk about diaspora projects, demands, idioms, and practices rather than communities.[24]

1.2. Transnational Dissidence and Dissidentism

Activities of contesting the authority of power structures, mainly state-socialist authorities, have a broad semantic field in the literature and have been labeled in many forms, to name a few: nonconformism, resistance, and dissent. This thesis focuses on dissent, dissidence, and *dissidentism* in the second part of the 20th century in East-Central Europe. The vast literature on the different manifestations of dissent falls into two major categories based on their interpretation of various oppositional activities. Most apprehensions are descriptive and sometimes even normative; they seek to categorize all sorts of activities on a spectrum, defining what can be

[23] Eszter Kovács, "The Power of Second-Generation Diaspora: Hungarian Ethnic Lobbying in the United States in the 1970–1980s," *Diaspora Studies* 11, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 171–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2017.1398374.
[24] Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 12, https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997.

considered dissidence and nonconformism. Others, although accepting these categorizations, try to argue against the impact of these activities. Contrary to the normative categorization, more recent interpretations regard oppositional activities considered dissidence as discursive concepts developed in the Western discourse on East-Central European Others.

Barbara J. Falk's exhaustive overview of the question offers a descriptive definition of dissidence that she describes as a political and public form of resistance. Falk sees resistance as a continuum on which dissent is at the end of the spectrum and involves activities such as production and distribution of samizdat, public protest, and active involvement in groups outside the party-state with a possible risk of persecution or imprisonment.[25] Contrary to Falk, but still, in the same interpretive framework, Serguei Oushakine argues that in the case of the Soviet Union, resistance and dissidence cannot be situated outside of power structures as the "oppositional discourse of the dissident movement … in a sense shared the symbolic field with the dominant discourse: it echoed and amplified the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioning itself outside of or underneath it."[26] Like Oushakine, Stephen Kotkin does not consider an influential role of dissidence as he outright denies the role of dissident communities and alternative civil societies, except for Poland. Based on the numerical minority of dissident groups, Kotkin claims that they were in no position to achieve actual change. His concept of "uncivil society" shifts the analytical focus from dissidents to the communist elites who, in his interpretation, were the main actors in the fall of the state-socialist system in 1989.[27]

[25] Barbara J. Falk, "Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe: An Emerging Historiography," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 2011): 318–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325410388408.
[26] Serguei Alex Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 2001): 191–214, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-13-2-191, 192.
[27] Constantin Iordachi, "The Collapse of Communist Regimes: Civil vs. Uncivil Societies: Debate: On Stephen Kotkin's, with a Contribution from Jan T. Gross, Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment. New York: Modern Library, 2009," *East Central Europe* 40, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2013): 141–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763308-04001015, 143

Contrary to these interpretations, Jonathan Bolton and Kacper Szulecki focus on the dissidents' publicity and public persona instead of their deeds. Bolton defines dissidents as people who publicly expressed their non-conformist beliefs, primarily in writing, and won prestige both at home and abroad for putting their thoughts into words.[28] To put it another way, dissidents are East-Central European intellectuals who publish, mostly illegally, their anti-regime views. Bolton also affirms that dissent "has always been shaped by the selective perception of the West," adding that naming someone a dissident was the invention of American and West European journalists.[29] Szulecki, expanding on Bolton, utilizes the Czech dissident Václav Havel's term *dissidentism* as an analytical category for analyzing dissidence in "transnational context and under the Western gaze."[30] He argues that the dissident figure serves as a heuristic for allowing multiple meanings with "minimal word count."[31] The author proposes an ideal-typical model of dissidentism that allowed for both the modern category of "dissident" and the dissident figure to emerge.[32] The author suggests a "dissident triangle," enumerating three factors that allow for dissidentism. These are:

1. Open, legal, non-violent dissent, facing repression.
2. Domestic infamy and fame
3. Western attention, transnational ties, and empowerment from outside.[33]

Szulecki argues that dissent needs to be purposeful and open. Although dissidents claim that their activities are legal, their goals are subversive and undermine the existing order while

[28] Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.
[29] Ibid., 3.
[30] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 33.
[31] Ibid., 34.
[32] Ibid., 207.
[33] Ibid., 208.

maintaining the appearance of law-abiding.[34] Another factor of dissidence is that dissidents perceive government persecution as an injustice and a confirmatory gesture that reveals the regime's illegitimacy.[35] Furthermore, the author argues that dissidents received infamy and fame in their domestic environment through the regime's enemy-making procedure. Even though state-socialist regimes sought the monopoly of power, like all politics to a varying degree, they needed recognizable enemies, a sort of personalized opposition. Thus, the "dissident" became an anti-category of the social norm, showing how not to behave.[36] As a result, dissidents became infamous in the government's eyes and gained domestic fame. Finally, Szulecki emphasizes the importance of Western attention and argues that Western recognition of East-Central European dissent arrived when the common language of human rights became available to each party.[37] The author points out that international recognition amplified domestic recognition and allowed dissidents to stand against their domestic regimes. However, Szulecki emphasizes that "becoming global authorities" worsened the reception of the dissidents in their domestic setting, a sort of bad conscience, as we will see in subsequent chapters.[38] Nonetheless, despite the shared idiom of human rights, international recognition could not have been achieved without interpreting between East and West.

Central to the concept of dissidentism is transnationality. Although the term "transnational" has been used extensively in the recent period, thus carries the risk of overuse, the thesis relies on Padraic Kenney's approach to defining the meaning of "transnational" in this context. Kenney conceptualizes transnationality as a "social plane" of interaction, [39] a "social movement diffusion"

[34] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 209.
[35] Ibid. 210.
[36] Ibid. 211.
[37] Ibid. 212.
[38] Ibid., 213.
[39] Kenney, "Borders Breached:" 183.

that focuses on how groups share ideas, strategies, and tactics with each other. Kenney proposes a typology of six modes of transnational diffusion that allowed dissidents to form transnational networks:

> "Command (texts or orders by leaders, such as Mikhail Gorbachev's decision not to endorse a crackdown on East European opposition in 1989), Text (the circulation of translated essays among opposition figures, for example), Legend (in which activists respond to stories of opposition elsewhere, like that of Solidarity), Courier (the directed transportation of texts or ideas), Pilgrimage (journeys to a site of renown), and Convocation (international gatherings of activists to exchange ideas)."[40]

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars used a transnational approach to study the entangled histories of samizdat and tamizdat production. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Friederike Kind-Kovacs and Jessie Labov argue that dissident activities such as samizdat and tamizdat production is unimaginable without a transnational network.[41] Like the diffusion of texts, Kind-Kovacs and Labov emphasize that émigré movements should be viewed as a transnational phenomenon.[42] This thesis aims to argue that émigré movements as part of diaspora projects were a part of that phenomenon.

In the 1980s, transnational networks and connections had been aided by emerging new communication technologies. Even though dissidents continued to do most of their communication by mail, telephone, courier, personal delivery, or via diplomatic pouch, the first step for more accessible communication was the introduction of direct international dialing, which enabled international calls without the help of an operator (and potential informant towards the authorities).[43] As we will see, in the 1980s, dissidents increasingly used music tapes to record their

[40] Kenney, "Borders Breached:" 183.
[41] Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, "Samizdat and Tamizdat: Entangled Phenomena?," in *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (Berghahn Books, 2013). 9
[42] Kind-Kovács and Labov, "Samizdat and Tamizdat," 11.
[43] Sabrina P. Ramet, "Nonconformity, Dissent, Opposition, and Resistance in the German Democratic Republic" (Research Seminar in History, Online presentation, May 27, 2020).

thoughts, which they then sent using the old methods of communication. With the spread of computers, either built at home or smuggled from the West, more technological-minded and inventive people could code text on music tapes, thus concealing the information from an unwanted audience.[44] At least in one case, modem connection was used to transfer messages between Hungary and the U.S. via the telephone line from the mid-1980s.[45] VHS also started to spread as a means of communication, and in certain situations, dissidents used VHS players given as "gifts" from the West as a source of revenue.[46]

1.3. Dissident Interpreters

The newly emerging dissident personages and their activities needed persons and groups in the West to promote them. There was also necessary to make domestic political struggles understandable and essential in the West. Szulecki argues that following the mass emigration from East-Central Europe after 1956 and 1968, emigres succeeded in obtaining significant positions in cultural and political centers in the West. Those emigrants, still receptive to their home country, could retell domestic happening in languages and "vocabularies" mutually understandable in East-Central European and Western countries. Szulecki considers these emigrants vital to transforming domestic dissent into transnational ones and names them "dissident interpreters."[47]

In the context of ethnic Hungarian dissidents in Romania and their Western interpreters, the picture becomes more complicated. Instead of individual émigrés, groups of Hungarians took the role of interpretation, and their origins often differed from the Czech and Polish cases. As previously stated, instead of émigré groups, the thesis uses the term diaspora project to emphasize

[44] Éva Blénesi, Interview with Éva Blénesi, Audiofile, December 3, 2016.
[45] Attila Ara-Kovács, Interview with Attila Ara-Kovács, interview by Nándor Bárdi, December 4, 2016.
[46] Géza Szőcs, "Letter from Géza Szőcs to László Hámos," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 13. SZEMÉLYEK, SZOCS GEZA.
[47] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 89.

that in the case of the Hungarian minority, it was primarily descendants of older émigrés, not recent ones, that took the role of interpreters. Simultaneously being receptive to their national homeland and its minorities, the first-generation Westerners could interpret their brethren's dissent more professionally than their predecessors did.

The fact that not only the dissent of one nation had to be interpreted (e.g., Czechoslovak emigres interpreting dissident activities in Czechoslovakia), but the dissent of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, made matters more complex. As already stated, the government's attempts to curtail freedom of expression made it increasingly difficult for domestic dissidents in Romania to inform either the West or their interpreters. In this case, dissident interpreters needed intermediaries who could ensure the flow of information from Romania. Recent ethnic Hungarian emigres from Romania to Hungary took up the role of intermediaries. They had local knowledge and connections among other ethnic Hungarians in Romania. (If the Hungarians community in Romania formed a parallel society in Romania, as earlier stated, these people formed a diaspora while being in their national homeland.) The dissemination of information thus became a two-step process, which involved two-step interpretation (and distortion as well). Additionally, dissident interpreters had their agenda and used domestic dissident projects to legitimize their purpose and actions, a factor not tackled by Szulecki.

The diaspora opened new communication channels and increased the intensity of the transnational circulation of texts and ideas. Szulecki argues that their presence was essential for domestic dissent to become transnational.[48] As Kind-Kovacs and Labov argue, the circulation of samizdat and tamizdat was "a network of transfer and dissemination, translation and retranslation,

[48] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 92.

amplification and distortion, and ultimately collecting and archiving…."[49] An integral part of this were reports of dissident activities and the regime's oppression smuggled out and broadcasted by radio stations focusing on East-Central Europe and broadcasting in their language, such as RFE and Radio Liberty, BBC, Voice of America, whom Kind-Kovacs calls the "echo chamber" of samizdat.[50]

However, smuggling information and sending it to the radios was often not straightforward, especially not for the Hungarian minority in Romania. Dissident interpreters and radios did more than "amplify" and "echo" texts. First, the essential echo chamber of dissident activities, Radio Free Europe, was from its beginnings prohibited from broadcasting on to or on the topic of ethnic minorities. Even in the early 1980s, when the Hungarian Desk of RFE gradually started to broadcast about the Hungarian minority, intermediaries first needed to get hold of information which they edited, i.e., interpreted, then passed on to Western dissident interpreters who then called the attention of the RFE to the already interpreted information.

However, dissident interpreters were not alone with their tasks. With the idea of human rights becoming increasingly widespread, various universal organizations started to gather information on human rights abuses using and building transnational networks. Kenneth Cmiel speaks about the exponential growth of information on human rights between 1965 and 1980 as fact-finding missions, analyses, congressional hearings, and academic articles on the issue started to pour out from NGOs. Cmiel argues that transnational networks were needed to gather information. In addition, a common language, the language of human rights, was needed for

[49] Kind-Kovács and Labov, "Samizdat and Tamizdat," 9.
[50] Friederike Kind-Kovács, "Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty as the 'Echo Chamber' of Tamizdat," in *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*, ed. Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov (Berghahn Books, 2013), 70–91.

dissident interpretation to function. Amnesty International (A.I.), founded in London in 1961, was the first that initiated such networks that reached their peak after the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975.[51] As a result of the contract in force, different Helsinki Watch Groups and Helsinki Committees "actively publicized independent activities, tracked regime persecution of open dissent, organized legal assistance, and lobbied governments" regionally and in the West.[52]

Sarah B. Snyder argues that the Helsinki Watch Groups used "symbolic politics," i.e., translating the suffering of Soviet citizens into personal stories using symbols, to make repressed human rights activists familiar to the broader public. As Jeri Laber, the founder of Helsinki Watch, said in an interview with the author, their purpose was to "try to dramatize the situation of these people."[53] The reputation of these groups correlated with their ability to gather information and produce comprehensive research reports and exert public pressure.[54] Helsinki Watch groups based the information presented in reports on recent emigrants' testimony, fact-finding missions, and documents transmitted from Eastern Europe, often through domestic monitoring groups.[55]

1.3.1 The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation

In the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), and its intermediary, a clandestine news agency, called the Hungarian Press of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Magyar Hirügynökség*), almost totally monopolized the discourse on dissident activities of the Hungarian minority in Romania from the late 1970s up until the

[51] Kenneth Cmiel, "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999), https://doi.org/10.2307/2568613. 1241–42.
[52] Ibid., 327.
[53] Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of The Helsinki Network*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 121.
[54] Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 121.
[55] Mark Hurst, *British Human Rights Organizations and Soviet Dissent, 1965-1985* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

liberalization of the press in Hungary in 1988. Although most studies analyze HHRF from a perspective of ethnic lobbying in the U.S.,[56] this thesis focuses on the organization's role as a dissident interpreter. However, these studies point out that this organization did not just interpret and amplify ethnic Hungarian dissent but also intensively lobbied on the part of the Hungarian minority in U.S. politics and formulated demands in the name of the Hungarian diaspora community. Kovács argues that the HHRF contributed mainly to the suspension of Romania's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status[57] in 1987 through years of intensive lobbying. The organization achieved its success by exploiting the 1974 Jackson–Vanik Amendment to the economic clause of its human rights potential. Kovács attributes their success of lobbying, and we shall add interpreting, to the fact that core members of the HHRF were second-generation Hungarian Americans. She considers that their U.S. socialization enabled them to present the issues of the Hungarian minorities in an understandable way to U.S. politicians.[58]

The HHRF achieved the suspension of Romania's MFN status from very modest circumstances. Located in a New York basement office so tiny that it could barely fit three people with the coffee machine placed in the bathroom, the suspension was a commendable act. However, the organization succeeds to a large extent in setting the narrative about the Hungarian minority in

[56] Eszter Herner-Kovács, "Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Ethnic Lobby Success in the United States: The Case of HHRF," *Minorities Research*, no. 15 (2005): 199–220; Eszter Kovács, "The Power of Second-Generation Diaspora: Hungarian Ethnic Lobbying in the United States in the 1970–1980s," *Diaspora Studies* 11, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 171–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2017.1398374.

[57] A most-favored-nation (MFN) clause requires a country to provide any concessions, privileges, or immunities granted to one nation in a trade agreement to all other World Trade Organization member countries. Although its name implies favoritism toward another nation, it denotes the equal treatment of all countries. The U.S. extends MFN status to all nations except those who have had their status suspended by specific legislation. Most suspensions since World War II were mandated under the Trade Agreements Extension Act of 1951. Countries with their MFN statuses suspended under the 1951 law can be and have been restored on a temporary or permanent basis through procedures laid out in the Trade Act of 1974 that apply to non-market economy countries, specific legislation, or presidential order. The U.S. granted Romania MFN status in 1975. (Will Kenton, "Most-Favored-Nation Clause," Investopedia, accessed December 14, 2020, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/mostfavorednation.asp.)

[58] Kovács, "The Power of Second-Generation Diaspora," 16.

U.S. politics and the Western media throughout the whole period. The HHRF was founded as a grassroots organization by enthusiastic young Hungarian Americans under the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania in 1976. As it broadened its scope of activities, it changed its name to the current form.[59] László Hámos, the founder and late president of the HHRF, set the organization's goal: "human, free, and democratic life for the Hungarian minorities, the right to use their mother tongue and to maintain and improve their cultural, religious, educational, informational organizations."[60] As we will see, the HHRF was the primary dissident interpreter of the Hungarian minority[61] and backed both morally and financially dissident movements dealing with the Hungarian minority.[62]

1.3.2. The Hungarian Press of Transylvania

After the early dissolution of the HHRF-supported Hungarian samizdat *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*) in 1982 (that will be further discussed in Chapter 3), the organization needed to secure another information source. So, it helped create a clandestine news agency that became its primary source of information regarding the Hungarian minority in Romania up until 1989. Recognizing the perceived disadvantages of samizdat writing, Ara-Kovács chose the unusual format of the news agency to inform the world about the human rights abuses affecting the Hungarian minority in Romania. Shortly after starting the Hungarian Press of Transylvania (HPT),

[59] Herner-Kovács, "Challenging the Conventional Wisdom," 212.
[60] László Hámos, "A Nyugati Magyarság Felelőssége: Eredmények És Feladatok," *Itt-Ott* 22, no. 2 (1989), http://www.itt-ott.org/hu/1989-22-evf-2-szam/5.
[61] The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent U.S. government agency created by Congress in 1975 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) commitments.
[62] Herner-Kovács, "Challenging the Conventional Wisdom," 208–209.

the Securitate offered Ara-Kovács the possibility of leaving Romania. Hence, he left the country to settle in Budapest. He ran the news agency from there till its 1989 end.[63]

The HPT served two primary purposes. First, it collected and published news in Hungarian, English, and German languages about the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania and tried to intervene in the protection of "intellectual institutions," such as universities, schools, theaters, editorial offices. Second, instead of using a nationalistic tone, the news agency reported the issues of the Hungarian minority in Romania using a human rights discourse. Ara-Kovacs thought that listing his community's problems would lead nowhere. He could only achieve a tangible solution if he made the issues of his community more understandable for Western organizations. Even though the HHRF used the problems of the Hungarian minority to legitimize itself as an intermediary, it also subordinated the organization to these self-legitimization efforts.

RFE frequently broadcasted the HPT reports. The first one aired on April 25, 1984, accompanied by an interview with László Hámos, President of the HHRF, on the meeting of U.S. and Romanian governments concerning human rights. In the RFE's program, the HPT reports were usually read partially or in their full length, without commentary making the reports' impact more direct. As already mentioned, the HPT primarily sought to distribute the news obtained from Romania through intermediaries and correspondents to the Western media (including RFE) and the various Hungarian diaspora organizations. In an interview, Ara-Kovács put this intention in this way: "I wrote the articles in a Western way because I did not want to tell Aunt Mary in Udvarhely[64] in Transylvania, what's the matter."[65] Even though the news agency had its

[63] Norbert Timár, "Az Erdélyi Magyar Hírügynökség (1983–1989) története," *REGIO. Kisebbség Kultúra Politika Társadalom* 27, no. 2 (October 28, 2019): 182–210, https://doi.org/10.17355/rkkpt.v27i2.264.
[64] Székelyudvarhely (in short: Udvarhely; Romanian: Odorheiu Secuiesc, German: Odorhellen) is a small town in Transylvania, Romania with approx. 35,000 inhabitants, most of whom are ethnic Hungarians.
[65] Interview with Attila Ara-Kovács, December 3, 2016, Budapest.

headquarters in Budapest, it tried to maintain the appearance that it operated in Transylvania and that people edited and sent out the reports from there. As one tactic, he attempted to present news coming from Budapest as if it came from correspondents and not the other way around.

In addition, Ara-Kovács, as chief editor, used an editorial procedure that gave the appearance of authenticity. During editing, he applied phrases common in the Western media that could evoke the image of professional opinions and sources of information in readers. Such expressions were, for example, "the Hungarian opposition in Transylvania" when an organized and established opposition to the regime could not exist, or "observers believe it" / "according to observers from Transylvania," which aimed to obtain the same effect. Editing the news, Western readers could associate with the Helsinki groups. However, such human rights watch groups were nonexistent in Romania at that time. The phrasing "according to our experts" or "according to our colleagues" could evoke the sense that the news agency had reporters on the field who, as experts, provided continuous reporting. Except for a few part-time editors and news correspondents based in Hungary, this was not the case. Instead, willing intellectuals in Romania briefed the correspondents often without knowing that they are playing the role of a reporter. The words "Hungarian circles in Transylvania" or "official Hungarian circles in Transylvania" may have given the impression of the officiality and organized character of the information sources.

Both HPT and HHRF were in the position to decide who received support and attention from the West. Komaromi argues that editors of the *Chronicle of Current Events* (which she identifies with the Soviet democratic dissidents) "were in a position to serve as arbiters of civic activity and public discussion among dissidents."[66] Similarly, Szulecki points out that meta-

[66] Ann Komaromi, "Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 1 (ed 2012): 70–90, https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.71.1.0070, 84.

political support was given for those who could "talk the talk of human rights."[67] However, help was withdrawn from those who were unable or unwilling to use the human rights language. Such was the case with the second Hungarian samizdat from Transylvaniam, called *Kiáltó Szó* (*Call in the Wilderness*). Ara-Kovács from the HPT and Hámos from the HHRF halted its printing in Budapest after two issues by simply not supporting its goals. They claimed that the samizdat used a "too introverted" language for readers to understand in the West or even in Hungary.[68] The samizdat purposes differed from the HPT's goals as its discourse focused more on Hungarian *Kultur* and sought to capture the *Zeitgeist* of Romania in the 1980s from a minority perspective.[69]

By the 1980s, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania had deteriorated dramatically. Hungarian minority elites, although preserved some amount of their political agency, the channels of ethnic claim-making, a possibility to bargain with majority political actors on policy alternatives concerning ethnicity, become severely restricted. As personal relations and petitioning the government did not yield results, a few people choose dissidence activities and turn towards Western publicity to pressure the government into the desired direction. Nevertheless, ethnic claim-making did not disappear; instead, minority elites supplemented it by dissidence and turning to the Western public. The thesis considers dissidence not as a political form of resistance but as a discursive concept developed in the Western discourse on East-Central European Others. Following Szulecki's ideal-typical model on dissidentism (a term describing not just the act of dissidence but its Western interpretation), called the "dissident triangle," I consider oppositional figures dissident figures if they were engaged in open, legal, non-violent dissent, for which they

[67] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*, 26.
[68] In the interview Blénesi uses the word "sabotage" when referring to the failures of the samizdat.
[69] Timár, "Az Erdélyi Magyar Hírügynökség," 186.

were facing repression, but also gained domestic infamy and fame. At the same time, his activities received Western attention and empowerment from outside, based on transnational networks.

As newly emerging dissident personages and their activities needed persons and groups in the West to promote them and make domestic political struggles understandable and essential in the West, the chapter presents the dissident interpreters of ethnic Hungarian dissidence in Romania. Dissident interpreters came from the sizable Hungarian diaspora, which the thesis considers a separate entity from ethnic minorities. In the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), and its intermediary, a clandestine news agency, called the Hungarian Press of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Magyar Hirügynökség*), almost totally monopolized the discourse on dissident activities of the Hungarian minority in Romania from the late 1970s up until the liberalization of the press in Hungary in 1988. Because of the Hungarian minority's complicated situation, the dissemination of information became a two-step process, which involved two-step interpretation (and distortion as well).

CHAPTER 2. Károly Király: The One Who Got the Embers Glowing Under the Ashes

On an overcast summer day, on June 16, 1978, Károly Király, director of the Caransebeș/Karánsebes[70] furniture factory, a former high-ranking ethnic Hungarian party member, and his wife, Helga, set out for Bucharest to attend a meeting at the Ministry of Wood Industry. They glided with their old but well-maintained Mercedes on the winding driveways of the Banat Mountains. When they reached 50 km from Caransebeș/Karánsebes on the unusually quiet road, they suddenly heard a bang and the car's windshield shattered. The bullet missed them. Five minutes after the shot, a police car ran past them from the direction of Caransebeș/Karánsebes, followed by hundreds of cars and trucks in a long line, as if it were the police's task to stop the traffic. After the incident, Király and his wife decided to turn back. They made their way home with a broken windshield in the pouring rain. While Helga tried to get through the road in the back seat, Király spread a plastic bag on himself and drove like that. In front of their home, a police car was waiting for them. Upon their arrival, Securitate Captain Cimpaca got out of the car and asked the director in surprise what had happened. Király replied nervously: "You see, my windshield was shot. This is your work." The captain only replied: "I don't know, I don't know."[71]

What caused the RCP to allegedly want to execute one of its former high-ranking members with the help of the Securitate? Király, an alternate member of RCP Politburo, First Secretary of the Covasna County Party Committee, member of the Grand National Assembly, and member of

[70] As the dissertation is about the Hungarian minority in Romania, I note the place names in both Romanian and Hungarian, where there is a Hungarian equivalent.

[71] Károly Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal: Önéletírás és naplójegyzetek* [With Open Cards: Memoir and Diary Notes] (Pécs: Sétatér Alapítvány, 2013), https://mek.oszk.hu/11500/11587, 59-60. Despite the convincing argument of Király's memoir that the Securitate really wanted to execute him, there is no direct evidence of this. Király claims that the papers recording the case fell victim to the destruction of the Securitate archive at Berevoiești in 1990.

the Council of State, until his voluntary resignation in 1972 of all his functions, committed the unthinkable: he openly confronted the Party. The RCP was the most un-partitioned party in the Eastern Bloc, which never experienced unrest inside its positions, and never went through occasions like the 1956 Hungarian Revolution or the 1968 Prague Spring. While in the spirit of the reforms and democratization, socialist parties from the region set out to allow different factions in the mid-1960s, inside RCP, such "defections" were unimaginable. When it came to the eventual wrongdoings of the Party, the general answer was that the party could never be wrong; it could be only misled.[72] As opposed to the usual practice, in 1977, Király wrote three letters to RCP leadership in which he criticized the party's politics regarding ethnic minorities, condemned Ceauşescu's personality cult, and accused the party leadership of lawlessness and unconstitutionality.[73] The letters soon become widely known among ethnic Hungarians and eventually ended up in the Western press and radio. However, 1977 was an exceptional year not just because of Király.

2.1. 1977 – The Forgotten *Annus Mirabilis*

1977 can be regarded as a forgotten *annus mirabilis* since a series of processes challenged the state-socialist regimes in the region both externally and internally and brought with it the birth of the dissident figure. Szulecki argues that the 1975 Helsinki Accords that allegedly sparked the East-Central European "dissident movement" was instead "a political opportunity that presented itself at just the right time to be strategically exploited by the nascent opposition."[74] Thus, the author provides agency to the dissidents, arguing that the Helsinki process contributed to an

[72] Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan Iacob, "Betrayed Promises: Nicolae Ceauşescu, the Romanian Communist Party, and the Crisis of 1968," in *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion and Utopia*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu, (Central European University Press, 2011), 272.
[73] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal,* 35.
[74] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central* Europe, 13.

impetus while the universal language of human rights caught Western media attention. This process, supplemented by the open dissent and forming of a transnational network of dissidence and domestic fame of Poland's Workers Defense Committee (KOR) and Czechoslovakia's Charter 77, constituted all the necessary elements of the "figure of the dissident." The new "transnational actor-figure" with visible and active groups and recognizable prominent members become popular in the West.[75]

Charter 77, the Czechoslovak human rights movement, inspired not just the Westerners but Romanians as well. Cristina Petrescu argues that the Romanian protest responded immediately to the novel idea of monitoring human rights abuses and tried to adapt them to the local conditions. She points out that the Romanian human rights protest of 1977 was the first to use the transnational networks to make itself known beyond national borders and guarantee its survival.[76] Paul Goma, "the Romanian Solzhenitsyn," took the initiative to express his support for the signatories of Charter 77 publicly. Other, primarily working-class people slowly followed suit and endorsed a joint letter addressed to the CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Belgrade. However, the vast majority who joined Goma were, for the most part, keen on getting an emigration passport. Their letter enumerated those rights that were not guaranteed to the citizens but practically not respected by the authorities.[77] The human rights movement lived for several months before Goma's arrest, but the Securitate easily kernelled the emerging movement by fulfilling the desire of most signatories: the possibility of emigration.[78] After setting Goma free, the authorities vainly pressured him to

[75] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe,* 13.
[76] Cristina Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote: Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania* (Editura Enciclopedică, 2013), 116-117.
[77] Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote,* 127.
[78] Ibid., 136.

retract its criticism. Finally, they stripped him and his family from their Romanian citizenship and let them emigrate to France in November of that year.[79]

In 1977 Romania also suffered a devastating earthquake. On March 4, Romania's second most powerful earthquake shook the country with 7.2 magnitudes causing the heaviest earthquake-related death tolls of the 1970s worldwide with the loss of 1,578 lives and injured an additional 11,221.[80] The financial damages were also significant, but the earthquake served as a pretext for the government to start significant demolition campaigns in Bucharest in 1982. The earthquake also contributed to the Jiu Valley miner's strike that was the most crucial protest movement against the regime before the 1989 revolution.[81] After the quake, Ceaușescu was unwilling to accept the reduction of figures in the economic plan for 1977 and insisted that economic operators meet all the previously established targets. To keep the plans intact, the government tightened on the social benefits of the miners. As a response, the Jiu Valley miners organized a strike between August 1–3. From the beginning, the miners insisted on speaking with Ceaușescu personally. Finally, after allegedly taking hostage the government's negotiation team, which consisted of high-ranking party members, the Romanian President agreed to come and meet the miners.[82] Ceaușescu faced a crowd of approx. 35,000 in a charged atmosphere. After a halting 5-hour speech accompanied with booing, as the only exit lay in the situation, he made conciliatory promises he had no intention of honoring.[83] Upon Ceaușescu's departure, the strike immediately ended, but repercussions were

[79] Ibid.
[80] Emil-Sever Georgescu and Antonios Pomonis, "The Romanian Earthquake of March 4, 1977 Revisited: New Insights into Its Territorial, Economic and Social Impacts and Their Bearing on the Preparedness for the Future" (14th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering, Beijing, China, 2008), https://www.iitk.ac.in/nicee/wcee/article/14_10-0013.PDF.
[81] Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*, 1995. 243.
[82] Florin Mihai, "Greva Minerilor Din Valea Jiului," *Jurnalul Național*, March 14, 2007, http://archive.ph/9apm0; Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Cornell University Press, 2005, 35; Sabrina P. Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation* (Duke University Press, 1995), 144.
[83] Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 245.

widespread among the organizers and party officials, who were incapable of controlling the situation.[84]

For a completely different reason than Goma's human rights movement, 1977 was the year of another case that did not become *dissidentism*. In the March-April issue of the Hungarian émigré journal *Irodalmi Ujság* (*Literary Journal*), published in Paris, appeared a study entitled "*Jelentés Erdélyből* (Report from Transylvania)" under the pseudonym György Lázár. The report was the first attempt that stepped outside of the framework of ethnic claim-making inside RCP channels and tried to solve the issues of the Hungarian minority by turning directly to the Western public. Behind the pseudonym stood two ethnic Hungarian philosophers, originally from Transylvania. Sándor Tóth, a philosophy professor at Babeș-Bolyai University in the Romanian town of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár and contributor to the local Hungarian cultural journal, *Korunk* (*Our Age*), and contrary to his activity HHRF thought to be close to the regime.[85] Zádor Tordai, on the other hand, was an existentialist philosopher – although he was disgusted to be called that – already with an experience in dissidence. Living in Hungary from 1960, he signed the Korčula Declaration in the company of prominent Hungarian philosophers (Ágnes Heller, György Márkus, Maria Márkus, and Vilmos Sós) to protest the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Tordai was also among the signatories of the declaration of solidarity of 34 Hungarian intellectuals with Charter

[84] Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 245.
[85] Attila Ara-Kovács, "Utazási Javaslat," November 4, 1984, HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, BUDAPEST CULTURAL FORUM TRIP TO TRANSYLVANIA (ABORTED).

77.[86] Later, he also participated in the editorial board of the 1980 Bibó Memorial Book that appeared in samizdat in 1980.[87]

The *Jelentés Erdélyből* provided through nearly 80 pages a matter-of-fact summary of the problems of industry, public education, culture, and economic policy concerning the Hungarian minority in Romania. Despite one of the "dissident interpreters," the New York-based Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), who translated much of the report into English, the analysis did not have a global impact.[88] The Hungarian underground press, AB Kiadó reissued the *Jelentés Erdélyből* in 1982 without having caused any particular stir. Although Tordai used his name to sign declarations, the authors chose to disguise their name in this endeavor which could have contributed to the obscurity of their study. Despite relying on transnational networks to create and disseminate the report, the pseudonym, and the fact that the HHRF did not put much effort in publicizing among Western journalists also added to its obscurity. The HHRF's attention and full potential soon turned to Király, the new "comet," as a Romanian flyer called him.

2.2. Király's Letters

Up until 1977, Király served as a Vice President of the Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality, an institution meant to propagate the RCP's politics and play a mediating role between ethnic Hungarians and the government through the Council's representants', but with less and less power in its hands, on the way of becoming an empty institution. Király started to oppose the regime in 1976 when at the plenary session of the Council, he criticized the RCP's politics

[86] "Situation Report: Hungary, 25 January 1977," 25 January 1977 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-8-47-108-3; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest. http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:3de8bff0-94e4-43df-b03d-9c4f3ed53716

[87] Bertalan Andrásfalvy et al., *Bibó-emlékkönyv I-II.* (Budapest; Bern: Századvég Kiadó – Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1991).

[88] HHRF Archívum, 1. HÁTTÉRANYAGOK, CIKKEK, JELENTESEK: ERDELYBOL JELENTIK FORDITASA.

regarding ethnic minorities. On June 2, 1977, Király went further and wrote a letter to Ilie Verdeț, Secretary of RCP Central Committee and the person responsible for supervising the Workers Councils of the various ethnic minorities. Király's position at the top of the Hungarian minority's highest political organ gave him an excellent vantage point from which to assess the organization, which was supposed to represent the interests of the Hungarian minority. In his letter, he outlined the shallowness of his organization's activities, charged the government with hypocrisy in its official pronouncements that "the nationality question has been solved,"[89] and presented his 12-point recommendations for a more democratically operated organization.[90] The letter mainly dealing with the betterment of the Council did not use the universal human rights language of emerging dissidents, however. As Oushakine argues, calling the Soviet dissidents' discourse "a mimetic reproduction of already existing rhetoric tools,"[91] Király applied the dominant party terminology and, in line with the party dogma, declared that the "primary aspect is material," but added that "it can only complement and enrich, not substitute for the spiritual" meaning the Hungarian cultural life.[92]

As Király received no reply for months, he followed up with two letters in August and September, this time to ethnic Hungarians at the Party's top (János Fazekas and János Vincze). Although both members of the RCP Politburo and Central Committee respectively, these people were not in as high a position as Verdeț. By this step, Király made the content of his previous letter known to a wider audience inside the RCP and, as he asked him to forward his first letter to Verdeț, provoked an answer. [93] He accused the RCP of a "tendency to forcefully assimilate the nationalities

[89] Here Király speaks about all the minorities living in Romania.
[90] Károly Király, "Letter from Károly Király to Ilie Verdeț," June 2, 1977, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, KAROLY KIRALY - VAROUS DOCUMENTS.
[91] Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," 199.
[92] Király, "Letter from Károly Király to Ilie Verdeț."
[93] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal*, 35.

living in Rumania." He cited a host of discriminatory and oppressive measures: the refusal to grant ethnic minorities a representative voice in government, the implementation of "restrictive quotas" denying employment opportunities to minority workers, the forced elimination of schools and classes offering instruction in the minority languages, the "naming of non-Hungarian speaking, Rumanian mayors" in cities "inhabited predominantly by Hungarians," the prohibition on the use of minority languages in public institutions and administrative offices, and a variety of restrictions on minority cultural expression.[94]

The tone of these letters was more bitter than those sent to Verdeț. The charges were no longer confined to the inadequacy of the Workers Council but embraced the government's entire policy toward national minorities. The letters accused the Party leadership of grave errors in the interpretation of Marxist-Leninism and called out against the cult of personality surrounding Ceaușescu. Király stepped up the game and assailed the "violence and torture" used against ethnic Hungarians that in some cases lead to suicide. He also accused the local Party and state organs of covering up the problems. In one of the letters, Király pointed out that the practice of the RCP did not accord with fundamental human rights, without detailing what that meant. Therefore, this cannot be considered a use of human rights language. However, importantly Király formulated in these letters the statement that would become the basis of the arguments for those engaged in the struggle for the rights of the Hungarian minority up until our time: "[t]he nationality question is a touchstone of democracy,"[95] thereby imposing the respecting of minority rights as a democratic minimum.

[94] Károly Király, "Letter from Károly Király to János Fazekas," August 1977, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, KAROLY KIRALY - VAROUS DOCUMENTS; Károly Király, "Letter from Károly Király to János Vincze," September 10, 1977, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, KAROLY KIRALY - VAROUS DOCUMENTS.
[95] Ibid.

2.2.1. "Transylvania is burning with fever" – Unrest and Repercussions Following Király's Letters

Király was finally called to Bucharest in early September to discuss his letter with Ilie Verdeț, followed by two more meetings. In Bucharest, a five-member disciplinary committee welcomed him, headed by Verdeț. At first, they tried to intimidate him, but when they saw that it brings no tangible results, the committee admitted some shortcomings in the functioning of "socialist democracy" and promised to remedy them. After about twenty hours of discussion, Király was summarily dismissed.[96] At their concluding meeting in October, Király members of the disciplinary committee pressed him to reveal his "collaborators" in drafting the document. Unprepared for this question, Király answered that he had written his letter alone but that many people agreed with its contents. He would not give their names, however, without their consent. At this point, Verdeț dismissed Király with instructions to return whenever he was ready to reveal the names. Király then called on Ion Gheorghe Maurer, a retired Prime Minister with well-known liberal views on the minority question. Maurer, still a member of the RCP Central Committee, volunteered to head a list of those agreeing with Király's views. He called several people from a presumably safe telephone, including seven members of the Hungarian elite who had earlier approved his letter, and thirteen of them consented to be included in the names under Maurer. Király notified Verdeț by phone, who took note of the names by surprise and returned to his hometown of Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely.[97]

However, Király's letters were not only known to these 13 people. According to him, thousands of people knew about them, and many distributed the letter in writing and on tape before

[96] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal*, 37.
[97] Ibid.

the Western press and radio published and broadcasted the texts. Allegedly, an ethnic Romanian man from Craiova created a group consisting of more than 30 people to disseminate the contents of the letters recorded from RFE's broadcast.[98] After RFE, the BBC, and Voice of America all broadcasted about the letters in January 1978, Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely, a city inhabited by Hungarians in a proportion of almost two-thirds, became agitated. Hungarian-language leaflets appeared on the streets with the following: "Károly Király is the comet; he should be followed. 896."[99] The comet referred to the biblical star of Bethlehem, which ought to be followed. 896 was a reference to the year of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin. Allegedly, Király's name was also painted on the walls of houses all over Transylvania. Inscriptions like "Our Király help us!"[100] appeared on the walls, which the regime's people quickly whitewashed, but the slogans were repainted within hours.[101] Groups appeared at Király's home and declared that they were willing to take up arms or commit terrorist actions. Király did not accept their offer partly because of his dissident beliefs in non-violence and partly because he considered them provocateurs sent by the authorities.[102] Military presence was also significantly increased as an emergency security force of over 1,000 men was concentrated in the city.

In this agitated period, Király met with the Party disciplinary committee four times between January and February 1978, but never in the presence of the First Secretary, Ceaușescu. These meetings were like police interrogations and involved several threats. On Ceaușescu's instructions, Verdeț stated that Király must leave his hometown to defuse the tensions caused by the letters there and in the whole of Transylvania. Verdeț declared: "Under such circumstances, we cannot

[98] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal*, 40.
[99] Ibid., 44.
[100] Using Király's name which means king in Hungarian was a wordplay referring to his leading position.
[101] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978, 1.
[102] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal*, 43.

ensure your physical integrity" and asked Király if he wants his daughter to grow up alone.[103] Upon his arrival at Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely, he had been (falsely) accused of a variety of misdeeds such as "abuse of power" while he was Party First Secretary in Covasna County and the promotion of Hungarians at the expense of Romanians.[104] After a week, the negotiations resumed, but this time Király fell short. Realizing that he might hurt several people if he continued his protest, he accepted being forced into exile for lack of a better alternative.[105] On February 11, 1978, he agreed to leave Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely and take up the role of the director at a furniture factory in Caransebeș/Karánsebes, the hometown of his wife some 300 kilometers from his home.[106]

2.2.2. Király Contacts the West

Király's letter resonated well with the interpretation of dissidence by Western media. However, this was not a straightforward process: it took Király's determination to expose his party's mistakes to the Western public. He needed dissident interpreters to help get the message across. Király wrote in one of his letters in January 1978 to his fellow Vice President of the Council of Workers of Hungarian Nationality. They, like him, complained in a memorandum about the discrimination suffered by the Hungarians in Romania but did not receive any answers: "It seems all this is in vain, we fell on deaf ears all the time – they are simply ignoring us! That is why we are forced to address the world's public, especially the U.N., the signatory states of the Helsinki

[103] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal*, 41.
[104] "Mistreatment Of Hungarians in Rumania Deplored in Letters Sent To Top Rumanian Leaders By Kiraly, Himself A Party Official: Protest Backed By Former Rumanian Prime Minister And 7 Prominent Hungarians There," in *The Karoly Kiraly Letters Protesting Minority Oppression in Rumania and Their Reflection in The World Press 1978-1979* (New York, NY: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1978) in HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, KAROLY KIRALY - VARIOUS DOCUMENTS; and Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal,* 38.
[105] Király, *Nyílt kártyákkal,* 49.
[106] Dessa Trevisan, "Romanian Accepts Banishment," *The Times*, February 23, 1978.

Accords, and the voluntary international and voluntary human rights organizations."[107] However, Király formulated his opinion about the necessity to address the "world's public" long before this letter.

In 1977, after he wrote his letter to Verdeț, Király went on a summer vacation to Hungary. In addition to relaxing at Lake Balaton, he also had time to visit essential people in Budapest with the specific goal to notify them about the contents of his letter and ask them to forward it to the West. Király mainly sought contact with populist writers in Hungary because, as he later claimed, he was in complete agreement with many of their views. The populists (*népiek*) "saw themselves as the representatives of *völkisch* Hungarian traditions, epitomized by their valorization of rural and village life" in contrast with the "urbanists" (who later called themselves as Democratic Opposition) who "positioned their axis on life in Budapest, were disproportionately Jewish and politically more leftist than nationalist."[108] However, more importantly, the populists considered it particularly important to thematize the issue of the Hungarian minority. At the same time, Falk argues that the regime tolerated or coopted them more quickly because of their "selective use of nationalism," which was deemed highly functional for the government.[109]

Király met with Gyula Illyés, the leading figure of the populist writers, dubbed "the greatest living Hungarian writer,"[110] in his house on the shores of Lake Balaton. Illyés, who in his 1977 Christmas article called for a fight against the deprivation of ethnic rights, assured Király of his support.[111] In Budapest, Király visited a literary historian close to the populist writers and asked

[107] Károly Király, "Letter to Lajos Takács," January 20, 1978, HHRF Archívum, 1.4.2. HÁTTÉRANYAGOK/ROMÁNIA/KIRÁLY KÁROLY: K.K. IRASOK.
[108] Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003). 125.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Paul Lendvai, "Achilles Heel of Romanian Nationalism," *Financial Times*, January 31, 1978.
[111] Gyula Illyés, "Válasz Herdernek És Adynak," *Magyar Nemzet*, December 25, 1977.

him to send his letters to the West. However, instead of taking up the role, the historian recommended Sándor Csoóri, a populist writer who took over Illyés' leading part after his death in 1983 and had much better connections in the West. György Aczél, the most influential figure in Hungarian culture politics, also received Király through the intercession of Csoóri. However, during the brief meeting, which lasted only 5 minutes, Aczél stated that he would listen but did not express his opinion.[112]

Aczél's behavior was rooted in the defensive Hungarian foreign policy after the 1956 Revolution. Although there was increasing domestic political pressure on the Hungarian government regarding the worsening situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania, Hungarian party leader János Kádár was still inclined to the fact that delicate issues can be resolved at the level of bilateral relations and not before international forums. In 1977 he met with Ceaușescu in two rounds in Romania and Hungary. Kádár tried to deepen bilateral ties and came up with two proposals: to consider minorities as a "bridge" between two nations and set up consulates in regions inhabited by their ethnic minorities. Although the Romanian side accepted both proposals, the cultural bridge concept of minorities had no practical consequences, and bilateral relations did not develop with it.[113] Eventually, Csoóri sent the letter to a Hungarian engineer consultant in Stamford, Connecticut. By October, the letters were already in New York at the desk of HHRF, the most essential "dissident interpreter" in our story.[114]

[112] Károly Király, "Csoóri Sándortól Búcsúzunk," *Király Károly* (blog), September 13, 2016, http://kiralykaroly.blogspot.com/2016/09/csoori-sandortol-bucsuzunk.html.
[113] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 61-64.
[114] Béla G. Lipták, "Letter from Béla G. Lipták to the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania," Undated, HHRF Archívum, 4. LOBBI: KIRALY KAROLY - 1974.

2.4. Making Király a Dissident Figure

The HHRF snatched the opportunity to report on Király's case. Firstly, because the organization's primary aim was to "…to fight for the recovery of the rights of the Hungarians of Romania as a national, linguistic, and religious minority under international law, and to demand the restoration of these rights" by using the "American political rights and opportunities."[115] Secondly, Király showed all the signature elements of a true dissident: open, non-violent oppositional activity, domestic fame, and international contacts based on transnational connections. Even if the HHRF staff could not perceive this retrospective categorization clearly, they felt that his person is essential. Therefore, they had to work to draw the attention of the Western media to Király, while at the same present the characteristics of his dissidence following Western ideas on dissidents.

After the HHRF made sure the truth of the letters and that Király wanted to make them public, they contacted Western journalists. The CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Belgrade between October 1977 and March 1978 came in handy in this regard since a lot of bored journalists lingered in Belgrade eager to report on something interesting. The HHRF continuously informed these journalists about the situation in Romania and recommended Király's letters. On January 23, 1978, the Reuters and UP news agencies reported on the case, and the next day *The Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* provided a detailed report. The Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and RFE also broadcasted in many languages about the issue. The *Le Monde* published its article on January 25.[116] Allegedly, the letters' release was scheduled for January 23, 1978, Ceaușescu's

[115] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978, 10.
[116] *The Karoly Kiraly Letters Protesting Minority Oppression in Rumania and Their Reflection in The World Press 1978-1979* (New York, NY: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1979).

sixtieth birthday, to annoy the dictator.[117] According to the HHRF accounts, it was somewhat harder to convince the U.S. press, but eventually, *The Washington Post* published a lengthy article on January 30. The most considerable success came on February 1, when *The New York Times*, usually refraining from giving space for materials which they did not report first, published an extract from Király's letter to Verdeț in its prestigious Op-Ed section.[118]

Following Király was forced to move to Caransebeș/Karánsebes, the HHRF retook steps to keep the case alive. They got Király's home address and notified various reporters in Belgrade and *The Times* headquarters in London. As a result, three reporters traveled to Caransebeș/Karánsebes, about a four-hour drive from Belgrade, to visit him. The reporters managed to enter Király's apartment, guarded by the Securitate, and talked with him for four hours at his kitchen table.[119] Their talk at the kitchen table fit the already emerging stereotype of the East-Central European "dissident" and the location of their "truthful" conversations. The reports appeared the very next day. *The Times'* analysis considered Király's actions to have more severe implications than Goma's short-lived civil rights movement because of his party background. The report also emphasized the public support for his cause, pointing out that, according to Király, the support "…went beyond the Hungarian community as many Romanians approved of his campaign."[120]

[117] Ceausescu was born on 8 February [O.S. 26 January] 1918, but there is a birth certificate showing he was actually born on 5 February [O.S. 23 January] 1918. Nonetheless, Ceausescu celebrated his birthday on 26 January.
[118] *The Karoly Kiraly Letters Protesting Minority Oppression in Rumania and Their Reflection in The World Press 1978-1979* (New York, NY: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1979).
[119] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978.
[120] Dessa Trevisan, "Letter Telling Plight of Hungarian Minority Answered by Repression," *The Times*, March 1, 1978.

Although the HHRF information materials described Király as "the central figure in a growing protest movement"[121] and emphasized his "dissent" by calling his letters the "the first open challenge in recent memory to Rumanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu's rigid and oppressive nationality policies,"[122] the Western press did not seem to be interested in Király as a dissident. Instead, they concentrated on the security policy issue posed by the potential conflict between Hungary and Romania and emphasized the maltreatment of the Hungarian minority. The *Financial Times* pointed out that the problems of minorities in Romania had been overlooked in the light of the German exodus from Romania, amounting to 10,000 people a year. Further, the article emphasized the security threat of Hungarian nationalism: "A wave of aggressive Hungarian nationalism could, as in the interwar period, again pose a threat to the stability of the Danube basin."[123] While the article mentioned a possible Soviet intervention, it pointed out that "[t]he attitudes of the Hungarians accounting officially for 8 percent of the total population, has always been seen in the Kremlin as the potential Achilles Heel of resurgent Romanian nationalism."[124] *The Economist* also framed the issue as a potential conflict between two state-socialist countries with the possible interference of the Soviet Union.[125] *The Washington Post* also reported on the possible collision of two Warsaw Pact allies and dealt mainly with the situation of the minority.[126]

The HHRF managed to win over even Goma for "the cause" of the Hungarian minority in Romania. HHRF's sister organization, the *Komitee für Menscherechte in Rumänien* (Committee for Human Rights in Romania) held a joint press conference with the *Internationale Gesellschaft*

[121] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978.
[122] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978.
[123] Lendvai, "Achilles Heel of Romanian Nationalism."
[124] Ibid.
[125] "Tales from Transylvania," *The Economist*, February 4, 1978.
[126] Dusko Doder, "Minority Issues Splits Bloc States," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1978.

für Menschenrechte (International Society for Human Rights) in Frankfurt with Goma and Elemér Illyés, an ethnic Hungarian historian emigrated from Transylvania.[127] With the German, Swiss, and French press present, Goma stated that "…all Rumanians are prisoners of President and Party Chairman Ceaușescu's personality cult, but that the national minorities are treated as prisoners of the lowest order."[128] He argued that the Hungarian minority is deprived of its "most basic human rights" and that protests were met by the State with repression, including torture by the police.[129] Goma pointed out that contrary to Romania's being liberal (where he cited the Helsinki Agreements), the administrative practice nullifies this. The Romanian dissident said that Ceaușescu's policy of "rumanianization" does not want to grant peaceful coexistence to its minorities.[130] Goma looked to "the free press and to the labor unions in the Western countries" to help the "2½ million of Hungarians in Romania."[131] Elemér Illyés, on the other hand, told the press conference about a "cultural genocide" above all committed on the Hungarian minority in Transylvania.[132] Illyés, in a letter sent to the HHRF, called for a closer collaboration with Goma and asked for his invitation to the U.S. Illyés also reported that he is in connection with him, and they are co-writing a study on the situation in Transylvania.[133]

The HHRF used Király's case to mobilize the Hungarian diaspora community as well. With news of Ceaușescu's impending visit to the U.S., the organization called for a street protest. One of their leaflets called Király's protest "world-class sensational" and proclaimed that "[t]here has

[127] Elemér Illyés, "Letter from Elemér Illyés to Bulcsú Veress," February 3, 1977, HHRF Archívum, 1.4.2. HÁTTÉRANYAGOK/ROMÁNIA/KIRÁLY KÁROLY: KIRALY KAROLY CIKKEK EREDETI.
[128] Rudolf Krämer-Badoni, "Der Schriftsteller Goma Klagt Ceausescu An [Goma the Writer Indicts Ceausescu]," *Die Welt*, December 15, 1977.
[129] "Druck Auf Minderheiten [Pressure on Minorities]," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 15, 1977.
[130] "Rumania Accused of Opressing Minorities," *Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA)*, December 14, 1977.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Elemér Illyés, "Letter from Elemér Illyés to Bulcsú Veress," February 3, 1977, HHRF Archívum, 1.4.2. HÁTTÉRANYAGOK/ROMÁNIA/KIRÁLY KÁROLY: KIRALY KAROLY CIKKEK EREDETI.

never been such a critical moment in our fight for the Hungarians in Romania! We need to focus all our efforts; we need all the Hungarian support. We must not let Király down or waste his sacrifice."[134] Similarly, they tried to allude to the often-nationalist sentiment of many Hungarian diaspora organizations for fundraising purposes when they argued that Király "offered his life to his nation."[135] The protest, however, brought the biggest show in town and offered Ceaușescu the worst treatment he had received in a long time.

2.5. Ceaușescu's Visit

Ceaușescu's visit to the U.S. between April 11–17, 1978, was the peak of HHRF's efforts on Király's case: the organizations managed to convince a plethora of Congressman and -women and the President of the U.S. to seek clarification in the case of the Hungarian minority in Romania, with New York City Mayor Ed Koch personally confronting the dictator because of its policy towards minorities. For Ceaușescu's visit, HHRF began preparations early, and they soon reached the highest levels. On March 20, 1978, in a letter resembling HHRF's language, mayor Koch asked President Carter to raise the issue of the Hungarian minority during his meeting with the Romanian President.[136] Two days later, 66 members of Congress urged the President to indicate concerns about reports on human rights violations in Romania and "seek clarification" in the matter. The letter brought up both Goma and Király as support for their argument.[137] On April 3, HHRF started an aggressive letter campaign to convince those members of Congress whom the administration invited to meet Ceaușescu to bring up the issue. In their template letters, they promoted Király as

[134] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978.
[135] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, March 15, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, THE KAROLY KIRALY LETTERS PART 2_2-25-1978.
[136] Edward I. Koch, "Letter from Edward I. Koch to Jimmy Carter," March 20, 1978, HHRF Archívum, 4.2. LOBBI/KONGRESSZUS: CHHR CORRESPONDENCE WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS - 1978-80.
[137] "Letter from 66 Members of Congress to Jimmy Carter," March 22, 1978, HHRF Archívum, 4.2. LOBBI/KONGRESSZUS: CHHR CORRESPONDENCE WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS - 1978-80.

a "Rumanian dissident of Hungarian origin"[138] so that politicians could easily associate him with known dissidents from the region. The HHRF's staff also personally negotiated with the State Department and the White House during the preparatory work for the Romanian President's visit.[139] However, HHRF declared in one of their newsletters that the initial work was the merit of Király, whose "heroic stance resulted in the Transylvanian issue becoming hardened in the minds of the world press since January."[140]

Besides Ceaușescu's official welcome on April 12, the HHRF welcomed him with a direct message. In that morning, *The Washington Post* published a full-page ad in its foreign policy section. The sarcastic publication started by stating that there had been no improvement to the problems raised by Király. Therefore, citing the unreliability of the Romanian Post, they were republishing his article in *The New York Times* in its entirety so that Ceaușescu could also be informed about it.[141] By publishing the ad, the HHRF attempted to ensure that the issue will be raised with the Romanian President.[142] On April 13, both senators and Congressman- and women repeatedly confronted the Romanian President with the problems of Hungarians, and the issues came up during the discussion in the White House as well. At the National Press Club's luncheon, journalists confronted Ceaușescu again with the subject to which he lost his temper and busted out in a long speech negating Király's allegations.[143]

[138] "CHHR Template Letter for the Members of Congress," March 31, 1978.
[139] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, October 1, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK: ERDELY VEDELMEBEN 11-15-80.
[140] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, October 1, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK: ERDELY VEDELMEBEN 11-15-80.
[141] "'Dear President Ceasescu,' Add in The Washington Post" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania; The Washington Post, n.d.), HHRF Archívum, 9. MÉDIA, SAJTÓKÖZLEMÉNYEK: NYT HIRDETESEK 6-76_7-77_WASHINGTON POST_4-78 DAILY NEWS 4-18-78.
[142] Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, October 1, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK: ERDELY VEDELMEBEN 11-15-80.
[143] Ibid.

During Ceaușescu's visit, the Hungarian diaspora organized protests all over the country from Washington to Dallas, but the most significant demonstration was in New York. On April 16, two thousand people gathered at Ceaușescu's hotel, the Waldorf Astoria. Fearing the dictator's safety, the Securitate evacuated him to the headquarters of the Romanian U.N. mission. They dared to take him back to the hotel after midnight when most of the crowd had disbanded. However, when the convoy appeared, a few remaining people started to wave their boards and shouted their slogans in a megaphone. From somewhere, a scrambled egg landed on the windshield of Ceaușescu's car. The ambush surprised the secret police so much that they smashed two vehicles when they tried to turn onto the hotel's narrow driveway.[144] To calm the dictator, the State Department sent over Mayor Koch in the morning. However, Koch being a staunch supporter of the HHRF and well informed about the issues of the Hungarian minority, raised the regime's discriminatory education policy towards Hungarians.[145] To annoy Ceaușescu even more, Koch ended their meeting by asking the President in his witty style if he could recommend him a good Romanian restaurant.[146] Ceaușescu never returned to the U.S. in his lifetime.

After Ceaușescu's visit, the HHRF continued to testify in Congress on behalf of Király and even tried to enable his visit to the U.S, but the media attention completely disappeared after 1978. In October 1978, after threatening the authorities that he would apply for emigration, Király was allowed to return to Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely, his hometown. He has lived there under close surveillance while being constantly harassed and intimidated by the authorities. As his friends were subjected to interrogations if they tried to reach him, he lived in virtual isolation. The constant harassment and isolation took their toll: his health deteriorated, and due to the Securitate's

[144] "Erdély Védelmében!" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, October 1, 1978), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK: ERDELY VEDELMEBEN 11-15-80.
[145] Jerry Schmetterer and Owen Moritz, "Ceasescu Piqued by Pickets," *Daily News*, April 18, 1978.
[146] János Domokos, *Mégis* [*And Yet*], 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7hdtuu-cfk, 48'32."

manipulation, he falsely started to believe that he and his family are subject to radiation.[147] The HHRF managed to invite him to the U.S. through a Law Society, but the Romanian authorities did not allow him to travel abroad. Once he was completely isolated, Király could not focus on the persistent continuation of his dissent. Although he did not remain completely silent during the 1980s, he mostly wrote letters to the authorities about his condition. Thus, the Western media quickly changed focus and no longer dealt with his case, and, as it should be, it looked for new and more exciting news.

Amidst the general turmoil of 1977, when "the forgotten *annus mirabilis*" brought with it challenges to state-socialist regimes with emerging *dissidentism*, Károly Király was one of the dissident figures emerging others in the Eastern Bloc. Király was banished and harassed for his three letters to RCP's leadership. He accused the RCP of a "tendency to forcefully assimilate the nationalities living in Rumania" and cited a host of discriminatory and oppressive measures but stayed inside the party rhetoric throughout. Although Király showed all the signature elements of a dissident: an open, non-violent oppositional activity, domestic fame, and international contacts based on transnational connections, the Western press did not seem interested in Király as a dissident. Instead, they concentrated on the security policy issue posed by a potential conflict between Hungary and Romania and emphasized the maltreatment of the Hungarian minority.

The "dissident interpreter" HHRF set out to create a dissident figure from him following Western ideas on dissidents, but their endeavor did not prove successful. Several factors did not allow for him to become the next Havel or Michnik. On the one hand, Király's strong party

[147] United States Congress House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, "Extension of MFN Status to Rumania, Hungary, and the People's Republic of China: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Ninety-Seventh Congress, Second Session, July 12 and 13, 1982" (1982), 331.

background prevented him from fully adopting the human rights discourse used by other dissidents in the region. On the other hand, his isolation by the Romanian regime meant that he could not create and contact others through transnational networks. Although Király's case managed to activate the Hungarian diaspora community, who showed Ceaușescu the worst of times with their New York protest, Király only wrote letters to the authorities about his condition once he was isolated entirely. For years there was no one to take up his struggle.

CHAPTER 3. The Samizdat and the Poet: *Ellenpontok* and Géza Szőcs

In December 1982, Géza Szőcs, a 29-year-old ethnic Hungarian poet from Romania, was sitting in the interrogation room of the Securitate in a small town, 170 km far from his home in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár. He has been on the run for over a month for editing and disseminating the only samizdat journal in Romania at that time, entitled *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*). While hiding from the authorities, he has been hospitalized in a mental asylum. Contrary to the late Soviet-era dissidents, he chose hospitalization by his own will to avoid arrest.[148] In the interrogation room, he allegedly pulled out a gas pistol and started to blast. After rendering his guard harmless, he ran to the bathroom and destroyed documents in his possession. Soon the Securitate officers broke the door of the bathroom stall and beat him badly. Reputedly, as part of a "gentlemen's agreement," they agreed that Szőcs would not tell anyone about the physical violence, and the officers would forget about the pistol.[149] Although Szőcs denied his apparent involvement with the samizdat, the Securitate soon released him due to his ill health and the international pressure in his case.[150] After the authorities expelled his partners from the country in consecutive years, Szőcs remained to fill the gap left by Károly Király.

This chapter will look at how it was possible to create a samizdat through transnational networks and, more importantly, how the samizdat was disseminated and received in the West. While focusing on Szőcs as an emerging dissident figure among ethnic Hungarians after Király, the chapter analyzes how the West treated his persona. Since the East-Central European dissident

[148] See Rebecca Reich, "Inside the Psychiatric Word: Diagnosis and Self-Definition in the Late Soviet Period," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (ed 2014): 563–84, https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.73.3.563.
[149] János Molnár, *Az Egyetlen. Az Ellenpontok És Az Ellenpontosok Története* (Szeged, Hungary: Private publishing, AGAPÉ Ltd., 1993), 242–43.
[150] Géza Szőcs, "Tizenkét Képkocka a Nyolcvanas Évek Elejéről," in *Ellenpontok 1982*, by Károly Antal Tóth (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2000), 356.

scene had an all-male character, this chapter also aims to answer the question: where the women dissidents were in the ethnic Hungarian context.

3.1. Countering the Regime: The *Ellenpontok*

As Kind-Kovács and Labov argue, samizdat was a transnational social activity dependent on a "transnational system of literary production."[151] The short-lived *Ellenpontok* was a similarly transnational endeavor both in terms of its establishment and its operation. The samizdat was the product of the 1970s–1980s non-party elites of the Hungarian minority who tried to step out from the strategy of ethnic claim-making based on informal channels in the power structure of the Party. As Bárdi argues, this generation of young, university-educated elites operated "both inside the system (in editorial offices and educational institutions), and in separate informal/illegal organizations."[152] Due to the Romanian regime's restriction on the freedom of expression, this part of the elite mainly formulated their criticism in clandestine or external forums like the samizdat scene in Hungary or through RFE, aided by Hungarian diaspora organizations.[153]

As part of a transnational network, the HHRF supported the formation of *Ellenpontok*. With a scholarship initially to Berlin, Szőcs traveled to the U.S. in 1981. While there, Szőcs presented his idea of creating a samizdat in Transylvania to László Hámos, President of the HHRF, and providently asked for the organization's support if the Romanian authorities would harm the editors. With the promise of support, the first issue of the samizdat appeared in March 1982, but the publication only operated till December.

[151] Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, "Samizdat and Tamizdat: Entangled Phenomena?," in *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (Berghahn Books, 2013).
[152] Nándor Bárdi, "Generation Groups in the History of Hungarian Minority Elites," *Regio – Minorities, Politics, Society – English Edition* VIII, no. 1 (2005): 121.
[153] Novák Csaba Zoltán, *Holtvágányon: a Ceausescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája II. 1974-1989*, Források a romániai magyarság történetéhez (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2017). 87–92.

In December 1981, after Szőcs had been fired from his position as an editor for deviating from the communicated route to the authorities during his trip, he met with his friend, Attila Ara-Kovács, who had similar intentions to create a samizdat. Ara-Kovács oversaw the team's recruitment. As a member of the Ady Endre Literary Circle in Oradea/Nagyvárad, a forum for Hungarian intellectuals that offered a more relaxed atmosphere to talk about literature and politics, he chose most team members from the leadership council.[154] The first staff member became a Reformed minister from Tamașda/Tamáshida, but he stayed on board only for a short time. Then, in February, Ara-Kovács recruited another acquaintance from the literary circle – Károly Antal Tóth, a physics teacher, and his wife, Ilona. Finally, András Keszthelyi, a university student who had been in correspondence with Ara-Kovács, also became a member.[155] The division of tasks was the following: Ara-Kovács was the editor, but he also wrote texts; Tóth, in addition to writing the texts, also worked with his wife on samizdat production; Keszthelyi edited the occasional news section (similar to the *Chronicle of Current Events*), and Szőcs oversaw the dissemination and acquiring of information. However, none of the contributors revealed their real name, which led to the false belief that the samizdat was not a product of ethnic Hungarians from Romania and hindered its international recognition.[156]

As Kind-Kovács argues, clandestine literary materials created a transnational network of intellectual influences;[157] Oradea/Nagyvárad, at that time, was at the center of a transnational network of such influences. The city served as a hub of dissidents where prominent Hungarian

[154] Ara- Kovács said about the circle that "after the weekdays full of fear, on Friday evenings, it gifted us with the ecstasy of freedom." Attila Ara-Kovács, "A Rinocérosz Éve," *Beszélő*, February 1999. [154]
[155] Thanks to Keszthelyi's father, editor-in-chief of the Hungarian daily in Cluj-Napoca, he enriched the publications with much valuable information (Attila Ara-Kovács, interview by Nándor Bárdi, December 4, 2016).
[156] "Letter from Anonymus to His Friend," December 7, 1982, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].
[157] Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2014) 10.

oppositional figures frequently met with Westerners: "The Hungarian government introduced double-entry bookkeeping: the undesirable dissidents were denied a passport to the West, but the government left the red one, valid for the East. Therefore, if a prominent Hungarian opposition wanted to meet a Westerner, who was not allowed into Hungary, they met in Transylvania."[158] Ara-Kovács profited from these influences as he acquainted himself with all sorts of samizdat materials and met the members of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition.[159]

The *Ellenpontok* was an example of how a small intellectual group implemented a cross-border project.[160] As members of the democratic opposition (especially László Rajk and Gábor Demszky) learned the craft of illegal printing in Poland, they disseminated their knowledge not only in Hungary but as a cross-border project among the members of the *Ellenpontok* in Romania as well. Ara-Kovács remembers that:

> I asked them [members of the democratic opposition] in a message, especially Rajk, to get an apparatus that allows operation under the most primitive imaginable conditions. They were at our disposal with extraordinary cordiality and helpfulness. We were in contact with a liaison; neither Demszky nor Rajk came over. They were very exposed.[161]

The introduction of the *ramka*, a Polish screen-printing technique, increased the number of samizdat copies tenfold. While initially, they produced five copies per issue on a typewriter, with the new technology, they were able to distribute 50 copies per issue.[162] However, the editors also set out to get hold of a computer to effectively distribute the samizdat issues or a small radio station to be more credible using their voice.[163]

[158] Molnár, *Az Egyetlen*, 21.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There*, 12.
[161] Molnár, *Az Egyetlen*, 40.
[162] Károly Antal Tóth, ed., *Ellenpontok 1982* (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2003), http://adatbank.transindex.ro/cedula.php?kod=480, 8.
[163] "Letter from Anonymus to His Friend," December 7, 1982, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].

The *Ellenpontok*'s first issue was published in March 1982 but was dated December 1981 to deceive the Securitate. Each monthly issue had different themes: human rights, reactions on a freshly published chauvinistic Romanian book, Hungarian churches, ethnic repression, and the traditions of Romanian state politics. The last two issues were the "Memorandum" and the "Program Proposal," which the editors sent to the CSCE Follow-up Conference in Madrid. Ara-Kovács later recalled that he saw these documents as one of the stages in a longer process leading to creating an illegal party.[164] However, there was no time or possibility to form a party: the editors decided to dissolve the publication on October 29, 1982, since they had a sense of the increased surveillance. At their meeting in Oradea, Géza Szőcs raised an old idea of starting a radio station, but his colleagues rejected it. The authorities confirmed their intuition: on November 7, 1982, Securitate arrested the Oradea editors of the *Ellenpontok*.

3.1.1. Wave Of Arrest and The Beginnings of International Solidarity

The wave of perquisites and arrests started with Szőcs. On November 6, the Securitate raided his home and detained him for several hours. Since the secret police found the issues of *Ellenpontok* and other compromising evidence at his possession, Szőcs, according to their plan, admitted that he distributes the samizdat, but he falsely declared that someone produced it in Hungary.[165] After his testimony, the Securitate released him but projected another interrogation on November 8. On the day of his release, Szőcs withdrew his testimony, arguing that he testified under the secret police's threats and intimidation during the interrogation. At night Szőcs left Cluj-Napoca and went underground until his capture.[166]

[164] Molnár, *Az Egyetlen*, 54.
[165] Ibid., 234.
[166] Ibid.

On November 7, the Securitate held house searches in Oradea/Nagyvárad at the places of Ara-Kovács and Tóth. After that, the secret police detained the two editors for four days. The Securitate severely beat Tóth while Ara-Kovács was forced to listen. Eventually, both Tóth and Ara-Kovács testified that only three of them, including Szőcs, were behind the samizdat. After the testimony, they were both released, but the authorities kept them under close surveillance and prohibited them from leaving Oradea.[167] The secret police made house searches at least 17 people, among them László Tőkés, a reformed minister from Deș (Dés) and contributor to the issue on churches who will be discussed in Chapter 3. The secret police tried to find traces that would support their theory that the Hungarian authorities produced the samizdat.[168] However, ethnic Hungarians could not believe that ethnic Hungarians made the samizdat in Romania, and many thought the secret police, or "fascist emigrants" created the samizdat.[169]

The arrest of the editors triggered an international wave of solidarity. The *Ellenpontok* was known before the HHRF already in the summer of 1982. Additionally, on November 11, Csoóri, a leading figure of the populist writers and contributors to the dissemination of Király's letters, already notified them about the arrests.[170] On November 20, 71 intellectuals in Hungary signed a declaration and sent it to the President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic, the Hungarian Writer's Union, and the Hungarian Chapter of the International Pen Club. The declaration called for a protest against the actions of the Romanian authorities. The signatories also demanded the termination of police brutality and the release of Szőcs, whom the signatories

[167] Molnár, *Az Egyetlen*, 288.
[168] "Az Események Leírása," January 13, 1986, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].
[169] "Letter from Anonymus to His Friend," December 7, 1982, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].
[170] "Csoóri's Message," November 20, 1982, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].

believed was in captivity. The Hungarian Service of the RFE broadcasted the declaration three days later.[171] Besides signing the declaration, members of the democratic opposition in Hungary started actions as well. They publicized the case in their samizdat, the *Beszélő,* and notified the Helsinki Watch about the issue. János Kis, one of the editors of *Beszélő*, in a letter sent to a Hungarian engineer in the U.S. who also helped to distribute Király's letters, asked him to confirm their notification at the Helsinki Watch and notify Amnesty International as well.[172]

On November 23, Amnesty International issued its urgent action appeal on the case of Szőcs. Amnesty expressed its concern on Szőcs' arrest because of the "non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression."[173] By applying human rights discourse, Amnesty opened the possibility to other Western organizations to think about the case as a violation of human rights and dissent. Emphasizing the "non-violent" aspect of Szőcs' protest added to this, despite the poet's unknown use of force against the secret police. The "Memorandum" and the "Program Proposal" arrived at the Madrid Conference that started on November 9, two days after the authors' arrest. The documents helped the HHRF propagate the editors' case and opened the possibility for additional press coverage.

3.1.2. Memorandum and Program Proposal

In Madrid, the "Memorandum" and the "Program Proposal" contributed to implementing a new part of the final agreements on protecting the rights of minorities. Due to the cumbersome process of accepting the final agreements of the CSCE Follow-up Meetings among 35 signatory

[171] "RFE Newsreel No: H-586," November 25, 1982, HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].
[172] János Kis, "Letter from János Kis to Béla G. Lipták," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].
[173] "Legal Concern (UA 265/82; ROMANIA: Geza SZOCS)" (Amnesty International, November 23, 1982), HHRF Archívum, 19. NEMZETKOZI SZERVEZETEK, ARREST & TORTURE OF INTELLECTUALS [Electronic record].

states, a couple of new diplomatically formulated words represented a considerable step forward. Instead of the general protection of minority rights, the new provisions made the signatory countries accountable for ensuring "constant progress" in the field of minority protection.[174] The HHRF achieved these results by acting in unison with other Hungarian diaspora organizations and translating the documents into English within days of their arrival. In addition, intensive lobbying through personal presence at the Conference aided the process.[175] Through these methods, they continuously brought up the issue until the Conference's break in late December.

The "Memorandum" decried the policies of the Romanian government, accusing it of "threatening our [the Hungarian minority's] very existence as a nationality."[176] The text pointed out that "[s]uccesive Hungarian generations are brought up in an atmosphere of chauvinism…that preaches the superiority of the Romanian history and culture…" and stated that Hungarians live as "second class citizens" in Romania.[177] The appeal drew the attention of the conference participants to the shortcoming of the prevalent human rights approach when it came to ethnic minorities. According to the authors, individual human rights failed to "take into consideration the shared values critical to a national minority as a collective entity" and called for special legal protection for them.[178] They demanded the right to protect the ethnic identity and collective values, the

[174] "Concluding Document of the Madrid Meeting 1980 of Representatives of the Participating States of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Held on the Basis of The Provisions of the Final Act Relating to the Follow-Up to the Conference," 1983, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/d/40871.pdf, 7.
[175] Lobby methods even included episodes when a member of both U.N. staff and HHRF drove around diplomats in Madrid and told them about the issues of the Hungarian minority. László Hámos, "Az Erdélyi Ügy Madridban," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, MADRID CASE MEETING CHHRF EFFORT 1980-1983.
[176] "Memorandum to the Participants of the Madrid Conference Reviewing Adherence to the Provisions of the Helsinki Final Act from Editors of the Samizdat Periodical Ellenpontok (Counterpoints), Transylvania, September 1982." (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, September 1982), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, ELLENPONTOK_CSCE MEMORANDUM1982.
[177] "Memorandum to the Participants of the Madrid Conference Reviewing Adherence to the Provisions of the Helsinki Final Act from Editors of the Samizdat Periodical Ellenpontok (Counterpoints), Transylvania, September 1982." (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, September 1982), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, ELLENPONTOK_CSCE MEMORANDUM1982.
[178] Ibid.

establishment of an independent organization to protect their interests, and the creation of an independent international commission to examine the minority's situation and act as an arbitrator with a supervisory authority.[179] Finally, the authors asked the Madrid Conference to record the Hungarian minority's "right to survive" and secure human rights to preserve their culture.[180]

The "Program Proposal" declaratively broke with the regime's rhetoric and demanded the "fundamental freedom to voice demands" regarding protecting the community's rights. The authors organized the proposal into ten main demands with numerous subpoints. The most significant demands touched upon the possibility to maintain connections with Hungary, the need for cultural autonomy through independent organizations, and the end of the alleged measures aimed at altering the ethnic composition of Transylvania for the benefit of the Romanians. The proposal also demanded that the Hungarian language be treated equally to the Romanian language in Transylvania. Finally, with the Romanian government's plan to raze villages in the late 1980s, the demand for preserving "the environment which reflects our historic [sic] and cultural past"[181] pointed out the government's tendency to erase the cultural heritage of the Hungarian minority.[182]

Although the editors stipulated that the mediators could only make their names public if the Conference called into question the authenticity of the documents, the HHRF made their name

[179] "Memorandum to the Participants of the Madrid Conference Reviewing Adherence to the Provisions of the Helsinki Final Act from Editors of the Samizdat Periodical Ellenpontok (Counterpoints), Transylvania, September 1982." (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, September 1982), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, ELLENPONTOK_CSCE MEMORANDUM1982.
[180] Ibid.
[181] "Program Proposal by the Editors of *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*) in the Interest of Improving the Deprived Condition of the Hungarians in Rumania" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, September 1982), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, ELLENPONTOK_CSCE MEMORANDUM1982.
[182] Interestingly, the authors also demanded the restoration of the autonomy of Szekely Land. The historical region in the Southeast part of Transylvania had a compact Hungarian population and enjoyed partial autonomy up to the mid-19th century and later in the state-socialist period, between 1952 and 1960, although only formally. The early formulation of the demand for the region's autonomy is noteworthy because, after the regime change, it became one of the Hungarian politicians' key demands and remains an issue even today.

known and connected the demands to the persecution of its writers. Because the Conference started during the U.S. presidential transition, the U.S. State Department took over the coordination of the U.S. Delegation to the CSCE session. The U.S. State Department was striving for peaceful cooperation between East and West; thus, it was less inclined to promote issues in the Eastern Bloc. Nevertheless, the U.S. Delegation received a copy of the documents and discussed it in its considerations of minority rights.[183] Judith F. Buncher, a regional officer of the State Department, assured HHRF that the welfare of *Ellenpontok*'s contributors is essential for the State Department. She also emphasized that the "Fourteenth Semiannual Report by the President to the CSCE Commission on Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act" in its review of the Romanian government's policies noted the beating and harassment of the editors. The report identified them as "ethnic Hungarian dissidents."[184] Buncher promised that once the Madrid Conference finalizes, the problems of the Hungarian minority in Romania will continue to be monitored closely by the CSCE Commission staff and the State Department.[185]

Other U.S. politicians also brought up the issue during their visits to Romania in January 1983. For example, Senator Christopher Dodd asked in a letter to the Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger to address the human rights violations in Romania and the issue of the *Ellenpontok* during his visit to Romania. Based on the reports, Eagleburger expressed his concern on questions regarding human rights and assured the Senator that the Romanian part knows how vital the question of human rights is for the U.S. However, the Romanian government defended itself by arguing that the editors of the samizdat were released and, contrary to the facts, can live

[183] László Hámos, "Az Erdélyi Ügy Madridban," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, MADRID CASE MEETING CHHRF EFFORT 1980-1983.
[184] Judit F. Buncher, "Letter from Judith F. Buncher to László Hámos," July 13, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, JUDITH BUNCHER LEVEL 7-13-83.
[185] Ibid.

their lives freely.[186] Similarly, the Hungarian-born Congressman Tom Lantos, a friend of the HHRF, headed a congress committee in Romania in January. Lantos had a chance to speak with President Ceaușescu for two hours about the issues of the Hungarian minority and called the President's attention to the importance of human rights for the U.S.[187]

3.1.3. The Dissolution of the Samizdat

After their release, the editors issued protest statements and discussed the possibility of the continuation of the samizdat. At the beginning of March 1983, the editors gathered at Szőcs' house in Cluj-Napoca to discuss the continuation of the samizdat. Ara-Kovács supported the idea, and Szőcs agreed with him, but Tóth opposed it, so they decided on the final termination.[188] However, they issued a joint resolution in which they declared that the Helsinki Accords inspired their protest and that the Romanian authorities violated these accords in their name. The editors added that they felt threatened in their existence by this. They also pointed out that authorities were trying to isolate them and that there was no guarantee of their freedom.[189]

The *Ellenpontok* did not become genuinely known through distribution in Romania. However, despite its short lifespan, it became the most influential samizdat in Romania as it was able to send the protest documents on minority and human rights issues to the CSCE conference in Madrid and influence its decisions.[190] Furthermore, learning from the case of *Ellenpontok*, the

[186] "Amerika Külügyminiszterhelyettese Bukarestben Szóvátette Szőcs Gézáék Ügyét," *CHHR Bulletin*, April 20, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #1 4-20-83, 11.
[187] "Lantos Tamás Kongresszusi Képviselő Keleteurópában," *CHHR Bulletin*, April 20, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #1 4-20-83, 10.
[188] Károly Antal Tóth and Ilona Tóth, *Egy Szamizdat Az Életünkbe: Az Ellenpontok* (Kolozsvár: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2017), 49.
[189] Attila Ara-Kovács, Géza Szőcs, and Károly Antal Tóth, "'Létünkben Érezzük Fenyegetve Magunkat:' Ara-Kovács Attila, Szőcs Géza, Tóth Károly Tiltakozása," *CHHR Bulletin*, April 20, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #1 4-20-83.
[190] Molnár, *Az Egyetlen.* 23.

government reintroduced an old regulation that required writing samples from every typewriter in the country to identify any clandestine text, thus making it harder to write in secret.[191] Ara-Kovács struck a deal with the authorities and left the country to Hungary in May 1983, while Tóth and his wife followed him in the next year. Only Szőcs remained as he felt that he could continue his protest in Romania and be more useful there.

However, for those not protected by international fame, often imprisonment awaited. For example, following the Securitate's raid in November 1982, a military court from Bucharest sentenced an ethnic Hungarian actor from Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy for five years, with no possibility of amnesty, for "assault on officers of the law."[192] Also, as part of the raids in November, three ethnic Hungarian people from Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda were arrested and sentenced for unknown charges. One of them got five years, but she was amnestied with conditional release, and the other two got six years.[193] There is no evidence of why these people were convicted, but they were not related to *Ellenpontok*. Furthermore, these people did not document their activities and were not part of any transnational networks that would have provided them with protection.

3.2. From Poet to Dissident: The Figure of Szőcs

As both Ara-Kovács and Tóth left the country, and Király appeared in public less often, Szőcs remained the only person who carried on dissident activities and could be cast as a dissident. After the Securitate released him, he spent months in different hospitals in Cluj-Napoca and was

[191] "János Dési, "Kettesben Ara-Kovács Attilával, Akiről Az Írógéptörvényt Elnevezték," *Heti Budapest*, February 10, 1990," February 10, 1990. HU OSA 300-40-5: 6/2; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Hungarian Unit: Biographical Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.
[192] After his release, the actor died under dubious circumstances. HHRF reports asserted that the Securitate killed him, and they set up as if it were suicide.
[193] "Sűrgős Felhívás!," *CHHR Bulletin*, November 1, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #2 1-11-83.

fired from his teaching job. However, his father supported him from his pension. Although the father's support seems quite ambivalent, as it turned out in 2012, the Securitate recruited him, and he wrote reports even on his son. Szőcs, however, regarded those reports as less harmful and claimed that they were instead a parody of the "genre."[194]

3.2.1. Submission to the RCP

Although the authorities kept Szőcs under close surveillance and pressured him with constant house searches, Szőcs sent a submission to the RCP in November 1984 timed to the 13th Party Congress.[195] His proposal came in a period when Ceaușescu declared that "the national question has been settled completely in this country"[196] while calling any attempt of questioning his dogma "a diversion."[197] In a secret speech on November 9, 1984, he added that the "[t]he national minorities are posing a danger to our freedom" and pledged to "wipe out their hostile opposition and unquestionably reject all of their demands."[198] With writing a submission, Szőcs returned to Király's old methods of dissent, which Ara-Kovács had rejected as a form of begging from the authorities.[199] Szőcs thought that the "Program Proposal" should have been sent to Bucharest since, ultimately, the government decided the fate of the Hungarian minority. To obtain the government's compliance, Szőcs wrote a "minimal program" aimed to be acceptable for both

[194] "Szőcs Géza apja saját fiáról is jelentett," hvg.hu, January 2, 2013, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20130102_Szocs_nyolc_pontban_ir_apja_besugoi_multj.
[195] "Statement by the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania Supplementing the Oral Testimony of Laszlo Hamos on Behalf of the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania before the Subcommittee on International Trade of the Committee on Finance United States Senate at Hearings on Continuation of Most-Favored-Nation Status for Rumania" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, July 23, 1985), HHRF Archívum, 4.3. LOBBI/KONGRESSZUSI MEGHALLGATAS, 1985 TESTIMONY STATEMENTS, 3.
[196] Ibid. 4.
[197] Speech by Nicolae Ceausescu before the Joint Session of the Hungarian and German Nationality Workers' Councils, Bucharest, December 27, 1984; text, as translated by Agerpres, the official Rumanian press agency.
[198] HPT Release No. 62/1984, November 28, 1984, https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1984.062.pdf.
[199] Attila Ara-Kovács, "Ara-Kovács Attila Nyilatkozata," *CHHR Bulletin*, April 20, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #1 4-20-83.

the government and the interest of the minority. He tried to minimize the "Proposal's" perceived radicality as he thought it contained unacceptable elements in the eye of the Romanian government.[200]

Szőcs formulated his demands based on institutions and regulations already present in Romania in the postwar period. Compared to the "Proposal," the novelty of the submission was that he also included the German minority in his demands. Szőcs insisted on having a public list of the Hungarians and Germans living in Romania, the re-establishment of the Nationalities Ministry that existed between 1944–52, and on the Romanian government's request at the U.N on the introduction of a new article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights dealing with minority rights. Similarly, it solicited from the government the supplementation of the Genocide Convention with provisions relating to cultural genocide. He also requested the RCP leadership to signal their concern upon the arrest of an ethnic Hungarian dissident in Czechoslovakia. Szőcs substantiated his arguments with a lengthy overview of elevating the ethnic minorities' problems in the past and Western Europe. The HHRF made the submission public at the Human Rights Experts' Meeting in Ottawa in May 1985.[201]

Despite manifestations of intransigence by the Romanian leadership, Szőcs wrote a "Supplemental Memorandum to the RCP Central Committee," dated March 28, 1985. He detailed the regime's newest anti-minority measures instituted even during the brief period which had elapsed since the issuance of his submission. In addition, while recognizing the futility of

[200] Szőcs considered the proposal too radical (he was not involved in the actual writing process of the proposal; that was the work of Tóth and Ara-Kovács). Without specifying the details, who could have rejected the whole proposal on the grounds of this. Szőcs most probably referred to the demands regarding the autonomy of the Székely Land that went against the Romanian interpretation of such constitutional notions as the unitary and indivisible nature of the country. Géza Szőcs, "Letter from Géza Szőcs to Gábor," July 26, 1984, HHRF Archívum, 13. SZEMÉLYEK, SZOCS GEZA 1984.

[201] "To the Government Delegates to the Ottawa Conference" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, May 7, 1985), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, OTTAWAI FUZET KEFELENYOMAT_APRIL 1985.

petitioning the Romanian government, dissidents in Romania joined forces in early 1985 to undertake a novel step: the issuance of a joint appeal to the outside world, entitled "Proposal for the Creation of an UN-Supervised International Agency to Protect the Rights of National Minorities." The document reached back to the "Memorandum's" demand on a U.N. organization with similar attributes. However, it was significant because of the names of its three signers: Szőcs and Király (representing the unity of purpose among the younger and older generations of the Hungarian minority in Rumania) and a well-known Romanian dissident poet Dorin Tudoran (thus being the second open espousal of minority grievances by a prominent, ethnic Rumanian intellectual).[202]

3.2.2. The Cultural and The Alternative Forum (1985)

In the autumn of 1985, both the Cultural Forum and the Alternative Forum in Budapest addressed Szőcs' issue. The Cultural Forum was a CSCE meeting to examine the cultural provisions of the Final Act, for the first time held in the Eastern Bloc. Parallelly to the official forum, a three-day Alternative Forum was organized by the International Helsinki Federation and took place in private homes. The symposium symbolizing the rejection of the official forum's approach to culture served as a "performance of freedom and opposition."[203] While focusing on censorship, the meeting pointed out the success of the transnational networks of Hungarian dissidents.[204] The program included lectures by renowned intellectuals from the U.S., Western

[202] "Statement by the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania Supplementing the Oral Testimony of Laszlo Hamos on Behalf of the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania before the Subcommittee on International Trade of the Committee on Finance United States Senate at Hearings on Continuation of Most-Favored-Nation Status for Rumania" (Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, July 23, 1985), HHRF Archívum, 4.3. LOBBI/KONGRESSZUSI MEGHALLGATAS, 1985 TESTIMONY STATEMENTS.
[203] Padraic Kenney, "Opposition Networks and Transnational Diffusion in the Revolutions of 1989," in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, ed. Gerd Rainer-Horn and Padraic Kenney (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 217.
[204] Victoria E. Harms, "Destined or Doomed? Hungarian Dissidents and Their Western Friends, 1973-1998" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2015), http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/24205/. 304.

Europe, and East-Central European dissidents. Hans Magnus Erzensberger, Timothy Garton Ash, Danilo Kiš was all present while Susan Sontag chaired the lectures. Their presence drew the attention of the hundreds of journalists who came to the Cultural Forum to its alternative. The publicity of internationally known intellectuals was also boosting the dissidents' demands.[205] At the same time, the presence of other East European dissidents signaled solidarity, offered a place of self-understanding, and provided legitimacy by their numbers.[206]

As Szőcs was under close surveillance and regularly taken away for eight-to-ten-hour interrogations, he could not attend the symposium. Nevertheless, he sent a letter to the participants that singled out him as the only dissident from Romania and elevated him to other East-Central European dissidents. Szőcs' letter strengthened the common front strategy of the Hungarian dissidents to create, or at least show, a common front despite their antagonism since it brought in the issue of the Hungarian minority to which Hungarian populists could connect. Nevertheless, the letter, read out by Hámos, president of HHRF, was not dear in the description of the Hungarian society in Romania. Szőcs accused his brethren of having a martyr complex for which they turned away from him: because he did not become a martyr, he refuted society's excuse for not expressing their opinion freely. Szőcs confirmed his point by saying that the writer must write despite harassment.[207]

Not using human rights language, Szőcs surprisingly spoke of nation and homeland in his letter. He pointed out that the "social vacuum around him is artificially produced" and "does not penetrate the spiritual realms of the real nation."[208] Szőcs has been thinking since 1983 on a

[205] Harms, "Destined or Doomed?" 305.
[206] Ibid. 304.
[207] Géza Szőcs, "Letter of Géza Szőcs," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 13. SZEMÉLYEK, SZOCS GEZA.
[208] Ibid.

national spirit that unites Hungarians wherever they live, similarly to the notion of a Jewish nation.[209] He assigned the writer's role in preventing the abandonment of the spirit of the homeland. Then added that "the writer has to let everyone have such a homeland: let there be such a Romanian homeland, Hungarian, Kurdish, Palestinian, Jewish or Basque."[210] This letter and his submission to the RCP signaled that he was reverting to older forms of dissent that approached national self-determination without the human rights perspective. An English teacher from the University of Szeged, a close friend of Szőcs, also gave a personal statement about him that inspired Sontag to emphasize Szőcs' case in an interview with RFE. *The Wall Street Journal* also covered details of the letter.[211]

The HHRF propagated Szőcs and the case of the Hungarian minority at the official forum. As the authorities in Budapest made it much harder to interact with delegates, the HHRF had to find another path to approach them. They came up with an idea of a reception and created yet another space for the performative dissidence besides the Alternative forum. The event was attended by 65-70 guests, among delegates both populist and urbanist dissidents from Hungary were present. Members of HHRF had to work hard to convince the members of the U.S. delegation to raise the issue of the Hungarian minority at the forum. U.S. delegates were mainly people with cultural interests, not affiliated with the government, and they had limited knowledge about the region. The HHRF managed to convince William Least Heat-Moon, a Native American poet, and William J. Smith, a poet, and translator of the Hungarian populist writers, to raise the issue of

[209] Géza Szőcs, "Szőcs Géza Üzenete," *CHHR Bulletin*, November 1, 1983, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, CHHR BULLETIN #2 1-11-83.
[210] Géza Szőcs, "Letter of Géza Szőcs."
[211] Zsolt Csalog, "Beszámoló Az 1985. Őszi Budapesti Kulturális Fórumról" (New York, NY: Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, January 16, 1986), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, CSALOG ZSOLT_BESZAMOLO A KULTURALIS FORUMROL (NOT USED) _11-85.

Szőcs.[212] The Romanian delegation was silent throughout the forum, but they brought over an ethnic Hungarian writer from Transylvania to assure the conference that the Hungarian minority thoroughly enjoyed its cultural rights.[213]

Although the HHRF managed to raise the issues of both the Hungarian minority and Szőcs' harassment, they were unsuccessful in making Szőcs known before the Western readership. The failure to publicize Szőcs in the West was not entirely the organization's fault. Western newspapers tended to simplify the situation on the ground, so they dealt exclusively with György Konrád as the voice in Budapest and did not consider the views of the populists either.[214] The Westerners' narrow-mindedness had roots in the antagonism between the urbanist and the populist part of Hungarian dissidents. Both intellectual currents sought a geopolitical reorganization of Europe. The former desired to revise the Yalta Conference and dreamt of Central Europe, while the latter opposed the Trianon Peace Treaty, which they considered the primary cause of the Hungarian minorities' maltreatment.[215] However, both streams of thought contradicted the Helsinki Agreements, the basis of their protest, which propagated human rights and the inviolability of the borders. Konrad's idea was closer to Western media and intellectuals preoccupied with idealized Central Europe and rejected irredentism.[216]

[212] Szőcs later thanked in a poem William Least Heat Moon's contributions. See Géza Szőcs: *Indián szavak a rádióban*, http://szocsgeza.eu/hu/tolem/versek/346-indian-szavak-a-radioban.
[213] "The Budapest Cultural Forum Ends without an Agreement", 22 January 1986 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-8-3-15315; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:5481f395-fa19-47a7-882d-40c84ee111d3.
[214] Harms, "Destined or Doomed?" 305.
[215] Harms, "Destined or Doomed?" 293.
[216] Ibid., 305.

3.3. Where Were the Women?

Dissidence among ethnic Hungarians, just as everywhere in the region, had an all-male character, despite women playing a crucial role in the dissident movement. In addition to not being recognized, the situation of women, dissident or not, was challenging in Romania. The Romanian state socialist regime had the strictest abortion laws inside the Eastern Bloc; by Decree 770 of 1960, the government criminalized abortion.[217] As Gail Kligman points out, unlike in other state socialist countries, in Romania, pronatalism was born out solely of the fear of depopulation but from Ceaușescu's "megalomaniacal fantasies."[218] She argues that "the state's primary interest was professed to be the creation and maintenance of the labor force to build socialism…."[219] Despite the anti-abortion decree, the birth rate failed to grow. Thus, the "paternalist socialist state" implemented many biopolitical techniques to compel the population to act according to its goals. Most drastically, the government introduced a compulsory medical control of women aged between 14 and 45 every sixty days to detect possible pregnancies and prevent illegal abortions, drastically intruding into the private spheres of the individuals.[220]

When analyzing women's reaction to the Romanian regime's policy toward them, Petrescu asserts that "nobody, in particular no dissident women, revolted against the anti-abortion legislation."[221] In contrast with her claim, Szőcs wrote a letter to Gloria Steinem, an icon of the American feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in autumn 1985, in which he protested the regime's policies towards women. Although it is unclear if the letter ever reached

[217] Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*, First edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 5.
[218] Ibid. 7.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Cristina Petrescu, "A Genderless Protest: Women Confronting Romanian Communism," *Annals of the University of Bucharest / Political Science Series* 16, no. 2 (2014): 87.
[221] Ibid.

Steinem (or a wider audience), it was a clear example of protesting the regime's anti-feminist policies and, in this sense, the only Romanian feminist manifesto from the state-socialist period. However, the letter's actual intentions might be questionable for two reasons. First, Szőcs wrote the letter as a heterosexual male, partly responsible for maintaining the paternalist system that created the policies.[222] Second, in a later interview, he regarded the letter as part of the coalition-building strategy to raise awareness for the Hungarian minority. By this action, he intended to take advantage of his perception that Westerners paid greater attention to feminist issues than oppressed minorities. For this reason, he was mainly interested in publicizing his message rather than sending the letter to Steinem.[223]

In his letter, Szőcs dubbed the government's policy as "forced breeding" and "violation of human dignity." He argued that "women between sixteen and forty-five have no right to decide whether to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term nor is it any of their business."[224] He also called upon the unhygienic and carelessly done aspect of the medical examinations. Szőcs expressed his indignation when he stated that "seeing their [men's] defenseless wives, daughters and sisters exposed … those who tolerate this outrage without crying out should walk the streets shamefaced, with burning ears."[225] Szőcs pointed out the difficulty of raising a child among the general shortage of food and lack of social care. He also singled out the dangers of illegal abortion. He claimed that women of ethnic minorities protest assimilation by refusing to have children.[226]

[222] He refuted this claim in his letter by arguing that he raises his voice not as an official representative of women but on their behalf.
[223] Endre Farkas Wellmann and Géza Szőcs, *Amikor Fordul Az Ezred* (Budapest: Ulpius-ház Könyvkiadó, 2009), http://szocsgeza.eu/hu/tolem/eletut-interju/612-amikor-fordul-az-ezred-a.
[224] Géza Szőcs, "An Open Letter to Gloria Steinem," October 2, 1985, HHRF Archívum, 13. SZEMÉLYEK, SZOCS GEZA.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

The question arises as to whether Szőcs was a hypocrite since neither he nor his colleagues were eager to give women agency in the dissident movement (despite women being crucial to the practice of dissent) or questioned the all-male character of the dissident scene. However, Szulecki argues that the lack of women in dissident movements was due to self-marginalization and the "patriarchal spirit" of those times, regardless of whether we speak about West or East.[227] Based on case studies, he argues that women part of oppositional movements did not perceive their situation as inferior to men and instead emphasized the value of male friendship. Others approached their condition in strategic terms, arguing that their invisibility was the key for uninterrupted work.[228] Szulecki argues that because dissent was perceived as "risky business," it was automatically attributed to men while women performed "less visible and arguably less risky tasks–even if it was actually heavier work."[229]

In the context of dissent among ethnic Hungarians, several women emerged as active members, but only one of them was cast as a dissident figure at the end of the 1980s. Women mainly dealt with the logistics of dissent. In addition to the already mentioned Ilona Tóth, who played a role in the production of the *Ellenpontok* and, like her husband, was arrested and had to leave the country, Éva Blénesi was one of the key figures. Blénesi acted as a liaison between ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania and those seeking information from them. Over time she began to collect information and send it to the Hungarian Press of Transylvania as well. However, if necessary, she smuggled a typewriter or scattered anti-system flyers.[230]

[227] Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central* Europe, 158.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Éva Blénesi, Interview with Éva Blénesi, interview by Nándor Bárdi, August 21, 2018.

Éva Cseke-Gyimesi, a professor in Hungarian literature at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, defined herself as a dissident.[231] She contributed to both HPT and a Hungarian samizdat from 1989, entitled *Kiáltó Szó* (*Calling in the Wilderness*) and initiated a fund-raising campaign at the Cluj branch of the Writer's Union for Szőcs. In addition, she wrote bilingual flysheets in which she protested the potential demolitions of Transylvanian villages.[232] Despite her intense dissident activities, only a 1989 incident with the Securitate reached the threshold of the Western audience. Cs. Gyimesi and her students visited Doina Cornea, one of the most well-known dissidents from Cluj-Napoca, to express their solidarity, an action that resulted in persecution.[233] The case gained importance since the tropes of solidarity and mutual assistance between dissidents could have been effectively publicized, and the rapprochement of the two dissidents could be interpreted as signs of Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation. However, this turned out to be a vein of hope, as an exchange of letters between the two dissidents confirmed that historical traumas would not allow for appeasement soon.[234] Unfortunately, the reformed minister László Tőkés soon overshadowed her 1989 case.

3.4. Szőcs Leaves the Scene

Like Király's case, the authorities managed to isolate Szőcs by not allowing him to receive mail, turning off his phone, continuously harassing him, and forging letters to discredit him. Because of the forged letters, many charged him with being an agent of the secret police.

[231] Csongor Jánosi, "Éva Cseke-Gyimesi Collection at BCU Cluj-Napoca - Registry - Courage – Connecting Collections," January 17, 2019, http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?lang=en&uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n25187&type=collections.
[232] Ibid.
[233] "Eva Gyimesi (International Secretariat of Amnesty International, June 30, 1989)," June 30, 1989. HU OSA 318-0-5:113/8; Records of the International Federation for Human Rights: Country Files; Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary.
[234] Cs. Gyimesi Éva, *Szem a láncban: Bevezetés a szekusdossziék hermeneutikájába* (Komp-Press Korunk Baráti Társaság, 2009).

Nevertheless, Szőcs' frequent irresponsible behavior raised fears in many that he would expose them to the authorities, and many refused to cooperate with him.[235] In addition, Szőcs was excluded from his community because he drew attention to the possibility of free expression without much retaliation that further alleviated his situation.[236] Under these circumstances, he formulated the idea of emigration by the beginning of 1986. After repeatedly asking for his help with the process, Szőcs wrote to Hámos that there is no room for meaningful action in Romania, but perhaps in the West, he may still be helpful.[237] During a Securitate interrogation, he was told that he would do better to leave the country for his safety. Thus, Szőcs left the country on August 31, 1986. He initially intended to settle in West Germany but ended up in Switzerland after a short intermezzo in Budapest.

Despite its short lifespan, the *Ellenpontok* became the most influential samizdat in Romania as it was able to influence the decisions of the CSCE Conference in Madrid on minority and human rights issues. Furthermore, it was an example of a transnational endeavor based on cross-border relations of a small intellectual group whose members became dissidents. After the authorities expelled most of its editors in Romania, Szőcs remained to fill the gap in dissent left by it and Károly Király. Writing submission to the RCP signaled a return to old methods of dissent but at the same time singled Szőcs as the only dissident from Romania and elevated him to other East-Central European dissidents. Regardless of his harassment and the HHRF's efforts, Szőcs did not become known in the West because the Western media tended to simplify complex issues and focus on one dissident figure in a national context. Interestingly, Szőcs became a controversial

[235] Attila Ara-Kovács, "Letter from Attila Ara-Kovács to László Hámos," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 10. ERDÉLYI MAGYAR HÍRÜGYNÖKSÉG, Ara-Kovács Attila HPT levelek & egyéb jelentések.
[236] This was contrasted by the fact that at least three ethnic Hungarians were in prison at that time.
[237] Géza Szőcs, "Letter from Géza Szőcs to László Hámos," n.d., HHRF Archívum, 13. SZEMÉLYEK, SZOCS GEZA.

feminist by protesting the regime's anti-feminist policies. However, his intention to exploit the cause of feminism to propagate the issues of ethnic minorities in a context where ethnic Hungarian women solely dealt with the logistic of dissent and male dissident figures overshadowed them, spoils the whole picture.

CHAPTER 4. László Tőkés the Dissident Priest

On a spring day of 1989, two French Canadian citizens were pulled over halfway between Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár and Târgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely by Securitate agents. The agents told the Canadians that they had five hours to leave the country, then they escorted them to the Romanian-Hungarian border, where guards spent four hours meticulously searching their belongings, viewing the videotapes they made and interrogating them. Besides threatening and insulting them, the guards kept asking in a condescending manner why two men "hadn't gone to Bulgaria instead."[238] The law enforcement authorities were upset because the two Canadians have been engaged in a secret mission to record an interview with László Tőkés, an ethnic Hungarian Reformed minister from Timișoara/Temesvár. When it finally aired, the interview made Tőkés' the "dissident priest" whose human rights activism became known worldwide. Because of the interview, the minister had been fired and evicted from the apartment he was entitled to as a pastor. The possibility of eviction outraged his congregation, and the spark of the Romanian Revolution erupted from their protest. In the interview with the Canadians, Tőkés declared: "The wall of silence must be destroyed."[239] As a result, the "wall of silence" collapsed around him in Romania and worldwide.

This chapter analyzes how a Reformed minister's disapproval of his church's leadership led him to become an internationally known dissident. As a result, he not only was a nominee for the Nobel peace prize in 1990, ultimately won by Gorbachev for "the leading role he played in the

[238] "HHRF Document for the London Information Forum" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, 1989), HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, LONDON INFORMATION FORUM HHRF DOCUMENT.
[239] "Interjú Tőkés Lászlóval," *Panoráma* (Magyar Televízió, July 24, 1989), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_8BNYNDVjE&ab_channel=M%C3%A1rk%C3%B3L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3.

radical changes in East-West relations,"[240] but he is also credited with initiating the Romanian Revolution of 1989. The chapter will ask how Tőkés constructed this dissident image professionally despite his isolation using transnational networks built by his dissident predecessors. It will also analyze how his *dissidentism* manifested in the West.

4.1. Tőkés' Early Dissent

Tőkés' public dissent started with the appearance of the *Ellenpontok* samizdat in 1982. At that time, he served at Dej/Dés and quickly became a popular young minister who organized an active communal life around the church. The Reformed (or Calvinist) Church numbered some 800,000 members, and its membership was almost entirely Hungarian, with religious services conducted in Hungarian. However, in practice, the government did not grant independence to the church. Contrary to the Catholics, the Reformed Church's leadership concluded a pact with the Romanian government in 1949, which gave the Romanian authorities the right to intervene in the church's affairs.[241] By the 1980s, the Securitate coopted a large portion of the church elite, including bishops and theology professors, at the only Protestant university in the country.[242] Tőkés passed a study describing the precarious situation of the Reformed Church to Géza Szőcs, editor of *Ellenpontok,* without disclosing his name and knowing exactly where his article will be published.[243]

The article appeared in the 4th issue of the *Ellenpontok* and focused on three main topics: how the church violates its laws, the falsity of official and church communication, and the "reality"

[240] "The Nobel Peace Prize 1990," NobelPrize.org, accessed June 17, 2021, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1990/summary/.
[241] "Summary Report on the Situation of the Hungarian Minority in Rumania" (Hungarian Democratic Forum, March 1988), HHRF Archívum, 1.4. HÁTTÉRANYAGOK/ROMÁNIA, MDF JELENTES ANGOL FORDITAS AZ ERDELYI HELYZETROL, 31.
[242] Petényi Katalin and Kabay Barna, *Szigorúan ellenőrzött életek* (Movie Trend Kft., 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS2dcWlqQyc&ab_channel=ethfil.
[243] "Az Erdélyi Ellenírók," *Beszélő*, November 14, 1992.

behind the official communication. The minister decried that the church, similarly to the state, denied the right to freedom of expression both from its priest and the faithful. He argued that the institution had become subservient to the authorities, especially the Securitate, and accused his bishops of assisting these processes.[244] Tőkés pointed out that the minority institutional system vital to the ethnocultural reproduction of the community had degraded drastically (the regime curtailed the educational system, while other cultural institutions were put under firm party control, and several Hungarian magazines and news outlets had been merged or closed).[245] In light of this, he suggested that "the churches had the task of preserving the nation," especially the Reformed Church because of its Hungarian character. [246] The minister also mentioned that censorship bound the church press and book publishing, and because of that, the church cannot even meet the elementary hymnal and wall calendar needs of the faithful.[247] The need for church publication led him to another protest.

In 1983, Tőkés surveyed other priests on the number of church publications in their congregation. When the survey results confirmed a severe shortage of hymnals and bibles, the minister wrote a letter to his bishop, who, in turn, initiated disciplinary proceedings against him.[248] Additionally, the Securitate carried out a house search at him as they had photographic evidence that Tőkés met Szőcs in Dej/Dés in 1982.[249] Since he was a well-known priest, the secret police let him go. However, because he had problems with the authorities, the bishop summoned Tőkés before a disciplinary committee. Although the committee did not condemn him, the bishop still

[244] László Tőkés, "A Református Egyház Helyzete Erdélyben," in *Ellenpontok 1982*, ed. Károly Antal Tóth (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2003).
[245] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 61–72
[246] Tőkés, "A Református Egyház Helyzete Erdélyben."
[247] Ibid.
[248] "A Szelíd Ellenálló: Tőkés László," January 25, 1990, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, BACKGROUND TO THE PERSECUTION OF REV. LASZLO TOKES 12-18-89.
[249] Árpád Szőczi, *Temesvár: A Romániai Forradalom Kitörésének Valódi Története"* (iUniverse, 2013).

transferred him to a remote village. Tőkés protested the decision, so in 1984 he was relieved of his ministerial position for two years.[250] At the same time, the bishopric retired his father, an auxiliary bishop of the Reformed Church, renowned theology professor, and editor of the Hungarian theology journal in Romania, three years before his term.[251] These measures further radicalized him, so he started to contribute to the nascent Hungarian Press of Transylvania, established by Attila Ara-Kovács, former editor of *Ellenpontok*, with a series of reports on the Reformed Church. He also acted as a liaison between the news agency in Budapest and people in Transylvania willing to send information.[252]

Tőkés's dissent focused solely on church matters up until 1988. He stated in a later interview: "I considered that, as part of the whole, I could represent our universal interests by working in the church field."[253] Tőkés published several reports anonymously on the Reformed Church in the form of HPT news reports. He also wrote open letters in which he protested the unlawfulness of the church's proceedings and the curtailing of theological education in times of severe pastoral shortage (at the end of the 1980s, the number of admitted theology students declined to two-thirds of previous decades).[254] Tőkés even organized a sit-in kind of protest action in the summer of 1985 at the bishopric and the theology in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, which he

[250] "A Szelíd Ellenálló: Tőkés László," January 25, 1990, HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, BACKGROUND TO THE PERSECUTION OF REV. LASZLO TOKES 12-18-89.
[251] "Release No. 25/1983" (Hungarian Press of Transylvania, December 1, 1983), https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1983.025.pdf; "Release No. 27/1984" (Hungarian Press of Transylvania, June 5, 1984), https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1984.027.pdf.
[252] Attila Ara-Kovács, "Egy Hírügynökség Története," *Élet És Irodalom*, August 26, 2005, https://www.es.hu/cikk/2005-08-28/ara-kovacs-attila/egy-hirugynokseg-tortenete.html.
[253] "Az Erdélyi Ellenírók," *Beszélő*, November 14, 1992.
[254] "THE SITUATION OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN RUMANIA" (HUNGARIAN PRESS OF TRANSYLVANIA, September 10, 1984), https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1984.047.pdf, 7.

suspended after a week because he considered that it reached its goal: confronting the church elite with his contempt.[255]

4.2. Condemning the Village Destruction

In September 1988, at an administrative meeting of the diocese in Arad, Tőkés, as an assistant pastor at Timișoara/Temesvár, and a fellow minister from Sebiș/Borossebes, an early contributor to the *Ellenpontok*, initiated a memorandum protesting the planned demolition of villages in Romania.[256] The reverends present at the meeting almost unanimously signed the note that was the only organized, public, and mass protest against the regime's plans. The memo reacted to Ceaușescu's 1988 declaration in which he announced that the urbanization process of cities would be completed by 1990 and, at the same time, the urbanization of rural areas would be accelerated and implemented in three five-year stages (1990–1995–2000). By this process, Ceaușescu sought to reduce villages by nearly half, destroying almost 8,000 of the country's 13,000 villages.[257]

Of the remaining villages, 558 would have been designated as "agribusiness centers," i.e., small, more urbanized agricultural towns instead of scattered villages. These numbers constituted almost double the figures adopted in the 1971 plans.[258] The primary role of constructing these new centers was to save arable land and raw material sources and achieve a higher population density. The 1971 plans considered different factors to urbanize villages such as location, communication

[255] "Egy Fiatal Erdélyi Református Lelkész Újabb Tiltakozó Akciója" (Kolozsvár: Hungarian Press of Transylvania, July 23, 1985), http://emh.adatbank.ro/jelentesek/1985B.pdf.
[256] "Biography of Bishop László Tőkés" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, April 16, 1990), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, BACKGROUND TO THE PERSECUTION OF REV. LASZLO TOKES 12-18-89.
[257] Csaba Zoltán Novák, "Területrendezés a Hetvenes-Nyolcvanas Évek Romániájában," in *Urbs: Magyar Várostörténeti Évkönyv*, ed. László Á. Varga, V. (Budapest, 2010), 160, https://www.academia.edu/11350568/Ter%C3%BCletrendez%C3%A9s_%C3%A9s_falurombol%C3%A1s_a_hetvenes_nyolcvanas_%C3%A9vek_Rom%C3%A1ni%C3%A1j%C3%A1ban.
[258] Ibid. 153.

possibilities, economic situation, material, human resources, and the given social, cultural, infrastructural facilities and rendered different economic, social, and cultural functions to the chosen centers.[259] Liliana Iuga argues that the urbanization plan subordinated to the means of industrialization was also an instrument for the government "to control people and territory."[260]

Although there was consensus inside the RCP during the preparatory debates that town and village planning would occur in parallel, the government took the first concrete steps in cities. The already mentioned earthquake in 1977 devastated several towns, including the capital, and accelerated the reorganization of urban spaces (dubbed "systematization" in the official language) in Romania.[261] Interpretations of the "systematization" vary between considering the process as a megalomaniac plan of Ceaușescu, wholly exposed to his personal decisions, hesitations, and anxieties, less and less aware of economic, social, and political realities,[262] or as the only economically feasible alternative for development.[263] The reorganization, however, presented territorial differences. Most Transylvanian cities did not have the same level of demolition as Moldavia and Walachia, but with new residential areas and several new buildings in the central regions, the cityscape has changed significantly. Sometimes the residential areas were built upon neighborhoods of smaller townhouses on the periphery of big cities.[264] Iuga argues that the territorial differences also resulted from different approaches to heritage conservation. While the historicity of the Transylvanian towns was more clearly visible "in their compact form, regular

[259] Novák, "Területrendezés," 154.
[260] Liliana Iuga, "Reshaping the Historic City Under Socialism: State Preservation, Urban Planning and The Politics of Scarcity in Romania (1945-1977)" (Budapest, Central European University, 2016), 398.
[261] Novák, "Területrendezés," 157.
[262] Ibid., 158.
[263] Iuga, "Reshaping the Historic City Under Socialism," 407.
[264] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 58.

street network and buildings with recognized architectural styles," the cities from Moldavia and Wallachia lacked those markers.[265]

As a first step, a massive village reorganization has taken place throughout the country. As a result, the government reduced villages by almost 12%. Novák argues that these steps did not mean the demolishing of the villages, but the authorities only abolished certain services (such as medical care, post office).[266] Although the country-wide urbanization project was not aimed directly at ethnic minorities, the government's steps initiated significant unease.[267] Considering massive population movements of urbanization that have led to a change in the ethnic identity of bigger cities in Romania, many Hungarians saw the plan of systematization as part of Ceaușescu's assimilation policies and as a "cover-up for the razing of their cultural identities."[268] Although concrete implementation took place in the villages around Bucharest and Giurgiu County starting in 1985, with facilities lacking even essential services in most cases, Ceaușescu's fall prevented the destruction of villages.[269] However, the demolition of villages also mobilized the Western public opinion against Ceaușescu's regime and focused the attention on the issues of the Hungarian minority even more. The increased awareness offered publicity to ethnic Hungarian dissidents and unleashed a wave of transnational solidarity and cooperation.

Public opinion in Hungary was also outraged by the Romanian government's plan to raze villages. At first, only the nascent civil movements condemned the demolition of villages, but later, the government took an active role in stopping the process (e.g., condemning Romania in

[265] Iuga, "Reshaping the Historic City Under Socialism," 410.
[266] Novák, "Területrendezés," 161.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Cristina Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote: Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2013), 190.
[269] Novák, *Holtvágányon*, 57.

international forums and the National Assembly issuing a condemning statement). The most impressive civil initiative was the mass demonstration in Budapest on June 27, 1988, which attracted 40-50,000 people, the largest protesting crowd in Hungary since the 1956 Revolution. The sizeable civic protest happened with the Hungarian government's tacit approval.[270] Organizations centered around the populists organized mainly the demonstration. Consolidated by then in the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF), the populists advanced themselves in being the protectors of the integrity of the Hungarian nation. Contributing to their advancement was that, at that time, most of the Democratic Opposition's leaders were traveling in the West. Harms argues that it seemed for many people that the Democratic Opposition was ceding the floor to the populists. The Hungarian Democratic Forum's declaration in defense of the Hungarian minority in Romania connected with the demonstration seemed to confirm Democratic Opposition's perceived retreat.[271] The Democratic Forum also personally reached out to Tőkés.

However, Doina Cornea, a former lecturer in French literature from Cluj-Napoca and Romania's most well-known dissident, best triggered Western attention towards the possibility of village destruction. A Belgian film crew met Cornea, living in house arrest in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, and in secret recorded an interview with her. The discussion that appeared in the film *The Red Disaster* made the systematization known before the French audience with its vivid imagery on construction sites in Bucharest and Cornea's fragile image.[272] As a reaction to the interview, the *Operation Villages Roumains* initiative was created in Belgium that sought to call the West's attention to the problem by establishing twinning agreements with hundreds of

[270] Harms, "Destined or Doomed?" 308.
[271] Ibid., 318.
[272] Cristina Petrescu and Corneliu Pintilescu, "Cornea, Doina - Registry – Courage – Connecting Collections," January 14, 2019, http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n9413.

Romanian villages with Belgian, French, and Swiss towns.[273] Also, HHRF had an unfulfilled plan to join the initiative. They even convinced Ed Koch, Mayor of New York City, and good friend of HHRF, to symbolically adopt Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, but HHRF's actions did not cover other cities.[274]

4.3 The Panorama Interview

In March 1989, Tőkés gave an interview to two French-Canadian journalists in which he expressed his opinion about the village destruction., He was deeply affected because, on the one hand, the village destruction would have led to the liquidation of congregations and, on the other hand, further assimilation of ethnic Hungarians. Tőkés, therefore, stepped out of the ecclesiastical framework and joined a subject to which the attention of the West audiences was heightened. Although he presumably was not initiating the interview, with this action, Tőkés became, for the first time, able to meet Western expectations of *dissidentism*. He showed open, non-violent oppositional activity, acquired domestic fame through years of protest, and had international contacts based on transnational networks.

As a typical dissident, Tőkés had manifold transnational connections, most notably with the dissident interpreters of ethnic Hungarians, the HHRF, and the HPT, which aided him in letting his thoughts be heard and well interpreted in the world. On the one hand, Tőkés acted as liaison and contributor for the HHRF financed HPT, and on the other hand, his brother István or Stephen, who emigrated to Canada in 1968, was an active member of the Montréal branch of the HHRF.[275]

[273] Cristina Petrescu and Corneliu Pintilescu, "Cornea, Doina - Registry - Courage – Connecting Collections," January 14, 2019, http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n9413.
[274] László Hámos, "A HHRF Tevékenységéről 1988. Szeptember -1989. Augusztus" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, 1989), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, BESZAMOLO 88-89.
[275] Péter Cseresnyés, "'Hungarians beyond the Border Appreciate Everything "Hungarian" a Lot More' – Interview with István Tőkés," *Hungary Today* (blog), May 13, 2020, https://hungarytoday.hu/istvan-tokes-interview-remigrates/.

István convinced a French Canadian journalist and an ex-politician to conduct taped interviews with ethnic Hungarian dissident figures in Romania.[276] The journalists' endeavor, financed by the HHRF, was a transnational project that involved Canadians, the Hungarian diaspora in North America, and the assistance of Hungarians from Hungary and changed history.[277]

The film crews' first stop was at Timișoara/Temesvár with László Tőkés, with further plans to reach Károly Király and András Sütő, a writer in Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely. On March 20, 1989, Tőkés, already under close surveillance from the Securitate, welcomed his guests in his church adjacent to his home to avoid the secret police listening.[278] Although the church was taped just like his home, Tőkés deemed it more secure since he assumed correctly that the secret police were not listening outside worship time. In the interview, the minister courageously and coherently spoke about his "irresistible urge to utter what I have swallowed so many times."[279] He declared that he must break down the wall of silence, "much more massive and impenetrable than the Berlin Wall."[280] Tőkés focused mainly on the village destruction, his church's reaction to it, and the question of human rights. He decried that the clergy and above all the bishops of the Reformed Church are "fully catching up with the plan of village destruction."[281] In his opinion, "the church cannot watch idly by what is happening"[282] and must collect information about the obscured facts

[276] Cseresnyés, "'Hungarians beyond the Border Appreciate Everything "Hungarian" a Lot More'"
[277] Hámos, "A HHRF Tevékenységéről 1988. Szeptember -1989. Augusztus."
[278] In 2012 turned out that Tibor Barta, the husband of Tőkés' sister cooperated with the Securitate and reported, under the pseudonym "Stelian," every detail of the minister's life to the secret police throughout the 1980s. He even prevented Tőkés's memorandum to be sent to the Paris CSSCE Follow-up Meeting by giving it to the Securitate. (Barna Kabay and Katalin Peténi, *STIGMA - Tőkés Eszter a Szekuritáte célkeresztjében*, Documentary (Cinema Star Kft., 2011), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lTvoo5MGZM&ab_channel=Ken%C3%A9zEndreZolt%C3%A1n.)
[279] "Interjú Tőkés Lászlóval," *Panoráma* (Magyar Televízió, July 24, 1989), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_8BNYNDVjE&ab_channel=M%C3%A1rk%C3%B3L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.

and protect "the fundamental interests of the church," that was, the preservation of temples and the community of worshippers.[283]

In the interview, Tőkés pointed out the difference between the Western and the Romanian interpretation of human rights. The minister claimed that in Romania, and especially among the Hungarian minority, "human rights are pushed into the background by collective rights."[284] Tőkés explained this phenomenon by evoking the allegedly totalitarian nature of the regime and claiming that the "standard of social development" has not yet reached "Western standards."[285] He stated that "[w]e [the Hungarian minority] feel a lack of human rights in our collective existence,"[286] meaning that the regime deprived ethnic Hungarians of their fundamental rights not as individuals but as members of the Hungarian minority. Nonetheless, he stated that "the rights enshrined in both the UN Charter and the Declaration of Helsinki are being violated most brutally every day."[287] Returning to his social underdevelopment theory, he claimed that people are unaware of their rights and violations.[288]

As the spotlights went out, the Hungarian cameraman immediately set out to Hungary and successfully smuggled the recording. The rest of the crew departed to Tîrgu Mureș/Marosvásárhely, but as already mentioned, the Securitate obstructed the continuation of the filming project. However, the selling of the interview was not as successful as their smuggling. Despite the village destruction being a huge controversy worldwide, Canadian TV channels were not keen on purchasing and screening the interview due to the obscurity of Tőkés. Eventually, the

[283] "Interjú Tőkés Lászlóval."
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid.

state-owned *Magyar Televízió* (Hungarian Television) acquired the recordings for its foreign affairs program, called *Panoráma* (Panorama). At the beginning of the 1980s, this would have been unimaginable. However, by 1988 the Hungarian government took responsibility for Hungarians outside its borders, thus allowing their media representation.[289] The program's editors added footage to the interview on typical Transylvanian landscapes with old ladies in black mourning dresses and the sound of destroying and squeaking bulldozers. Additionally, at the end of the broadcast, they also added a larger group singing the Székely anthem about a plea towards God to save Transylvania, previously considered an illicit song because of its nationalistic and perceived irredentist tones.[290] Tőkés's message and the added material impacted Hungarian viewers stronger than any samizdat, proving the force of the medium: Tőkés became a household name in Hungary and mobilized the Hungarian society.

In addition to many news articles and solidarity statements from different nascent civil society groups in Hungary, in August, the Hungarian Democratic Forum invited Tőkés as a speaker alongside György Konrád at their Pan-European Picnic at the Hungarian-Austrian border. The peace demonstration aimed to publicly open the frontier, part of the Iron Curtain, even though the fortification removal had already begun months earlier.[291] Tőkés, being under close surveillance, could not attend but sent a message with a leading member of the Democratic Forum visiting him.[292] In the letter, he referred back to his interview in March when he chose the wall as the central motif of his message. Tőkés said Romanian society only started to demolish their "inner

[289] In January 1988 Mátyás Szűrös, the Hungarian Workers Party's secretary for foreign affairs famously declared that "the Hungarians living in the countries surrounding us, including those of Transylvania, are part of the Hungarian nation" and added that "these people have every reason to expect the Hungarian state to be responsible for them…" (Henry Kamm, "Romania and Hungary Let War of Words Slip Out," *The New York Times,* February 21, 1988, HHRF Archívum, 5. CSCE - Helsinki process, PARIS CSCE MTG HHRF DOCUMENT).
[290] Ildikó Kríza, "A Székely Himnusz Születésének Háttere," *Honismeret* 31, no. 5 (2003): 68.
[291] Harms, "Destined or Doomed?" 333.
[292] Józsa Benő, "Amíg Egyetlen Híve Is Lesz...," *Napló,* August 24, 1989.

walls" built up from silence, fear, and self-limitation.[293] He proclaimed that he was "unspeakably pleased" with the prospect of liberty and new opportunities in Hungary and suggested that "the Europe House should be built from the torn down walls," referring to Gorbachev's 1987 concept of "all-European house."[294]

Furthermore, Tőkés called attention to the village destruction when he wrote that in Romania, instead of demolishing the Iron Curtain, the "madness," i.e., the government, wants to destroy villages. Finally, Tőkés pointed out that thousands of Romanians and ethnic Hungarians from Romania are fleeing to Hungary or the West and demanded the demolishing of the walls that "separate us from the Romanian nation, Europe, our Hungarian brothers, and our better self."[295] Thus, in his message, Tőkés touched upon the essential issue about Romania in Hungary besides the village destruction – the refugee crisis.

4.4. The Refugee Crisis in Hungary

In 1982 the *Ellenpontok* samizdat formulated already dealt with the question of ethnic Hungarian refugees to Hungary.[296] However, at that time, migration between two Warsaw Pact countries was scarce and unusual. However, by the end of the 1980s, thousands had fled due to the regime's repressive policies and the economic crisis, but the Hungarian government was unprepared for handling the ensuing refugee crisis. By 1989, Hungary officially admitted 30,000 refugees from Romania (the unofficial estimates counted about 50,000 people), but treaties with Romania tied the government's hands and made the legal situation of refugees precarious.[297] For

[293] László Tőkés, "Letter from László Tőkés to the Pan-European Picnic," August 17, 1989, https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/136/_nnVvTt7.
[294] Milan Svec, "The Prague Spring: 20 Years Later," *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 5 (1988): 981–1001, https://doi.org/10.2307/20043574.
[295] Tőkés, "Letter from László Tőkés to the Pan-European Picnic."
[296] See *Ellenpontok* 7th issue, http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf1600.pdf.
[297] Judith Pataki, "Hungary Tries to Resolve Legal Status of Refugees from Romania" in "Situation Report: Hungary, 24 February 1989", 24 February 1989 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-8-47-120-3; Records of Radio

example, two agreements signed with Romania in 1979 and 1986 made it impossible to grant citizenship to refugees from Romania or even consider them legally refugees. The legal Gordian knot also prevented refugees from leaving Hungary lawfully towards the West.[298]

Because the Romanian authorities refused to grant legal exit permits, many refugees resorted to the illegal border crossing. The Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that 6,500 out of the 20,000 Romanian refugees in 1988 entered Hungary illegally.[299] According to an RFE report, Hungary returned a fourth of those entering the country on the green border and let the rest stay in contradiction with its agreements with Romania. However, the news that Hungarian border guards returned hundreds of people coming from Romania stirred up sentiments.[300] Reports presumed that those returned had been persecuted and maltreated. Romanian border guards alleged shooting and killing of those trying to escape only exacerbated the outrage.[301] Concerns also arose about the alleged refusal to stay of Roma and ethnic Romanian people.[302] However, the RFE report predicted that the number of refugees would not fall because the village destruction program was "well underway."[303]

Hungary struggled with the refugee crisis not only because it was ill-prepared but because different social groups had contradictory opinions about the question. According to the RFE, Hungarians were concerned that a broad definition of a refugee category might lead to another

Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:a42f84c6-befd-4558-8208-fee7bd68a083.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Pataki, "The Problem of Transylvanian Refugees," in "Situation Report: Hungary, 24 February 1989", 24 February 1989 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-8-47-120-3; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, accessed June 21, 2021, http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:a42f84c6-befd-4558-8208-fee7bd68a083.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.

wave of migration from other communist and perhaps noncommunist countries when facing an economic crisis.[304] The Hungarian government up to June 1989 had dilemmas joining the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees as a first state-socialist country to alleviate the financial and logistical pressure of the refugee crisis. However, joining the convention reduced the chances of Hungarian citizens obtaining political asylum in the West. Under the terms of the convention, Hungary was not allowed to return refugees to Romania or any other country unless they had committed crimes or were thereat to the political system.[305] On the other hand, the government would have liked to discourage refugees from leaving Transylvania since the exodus would have weakened the Hungarian presence in the region.[306]

On January 28, 1988, a group of Hungarians, including Ara-Kovács, publisher of HPT and former editor of the *Ellenpontok*, founded the *Menekült Bizottság* (Asylum Committee) as an independent citizen's initiative aimed to provide practical assistance to refugees from Romania (accommodation and employment services, medical, legal, temporary aid). At the same time, they undertook to inform the Hungarian and foreign public about the situation of the refugees, monitor the Hungarian authorities, and enforce further measures through political pressure. However, unfortunately, the Asylum Committee received less support as it focused primarily on helping ethnic Romanian refugees, coming in a lesser number.[307]

Ara-Kovács was particularly interested in helping and organizing ethnic Romanian refugees to create a group that could have criticized Romania's policies towards its ethnic minorities. With his assistance and at his apartment, the *România Liberă* (Free Romania) group

[304] Pataki, "Hungary Tries to Resolve Legal Status of Refugees from Romania."
[305] Ibid.
[306] Pataki, "The Problem of Transylvanian Refugees."
[307] Veronika Kaszás, "A Magyarországi 'Alternatív Szervezetek' Fellépése Az Erdélyi Menekültek Ügyében 1988–1989-Ben," *Múltunk* 59, no. 1 (2014): 234–35.

was formed on April 12, 1988. The group members have been active in Budapest since 1987: they carried out a leaflet campaign and issued appeals. With the support of the Hungarian Democratic Opposition, the *România Liberă* began publishing a samizdat with the same name in April 1988. Several accounts describe the publication as the first samizdat in the history of state-socialist Romania.[308] However, the question arose in the analysts of RFE whether it was more of a tamizdat, i.e., a clandestine publication published abroad. Ara-Kovács refuted this claim by stating that "[The *România Liberă*] is not [to be] considered an émigré political group but an autochthonous one, living and carrying on its activities here in the East European milieu."[309] Ara-Kovács emphasized the embeddedness of the samizdat in Romania to present internal criticism of the regime's policies.

4.5. The Spark of the Revolution Becomes a Superstar

After the interview aired on July 24, which viewers could receive in the Western part of Romania, the authorities initiated a campaign against Tőkés and his congregation. Anonymous death threats and intimidation were followed by the disappearance and suspicious death in September of Ernő Újvárossy, a lay member of the church council and Tőkés's staunch defender. Church and state authorities' attempts to relocate Tőkés to another church failed due to the continuing refusal of the minister and his congregation to capitulate, even when authorities resorted to interrogating each presbyter in turn and interrupting the church services. Nevertheless,

[308] "Rumanian Pamphleteering in Budapest" (Budapest: Hungarian Press of Transylvania, December 3, 1987), https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1987.122.pdf; "Rumanian Dissident Group's Proclamation Concerning Famine in Rumania" (Budapest; Arad: Hungarian Press of Transylvania, December 20, 1987), https://hhrf.org/dokumentumtar/irott/hpt/1987.128.pdf.

[309] Vladimir Socol, "Romanians in Budapest Publish First-Ever Romanian Samizdat Periodical," in "Situation Report: Romania, 20 July 1988", 20 July 1988 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-8-47-212-9; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest., http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:d02c1cf4-c7e0-4f75-a2fd-ec03b5dbdeff.

the bishop, collaborating with state authorities, brought an eviction suit against the minister; at the ensuing trial on October 20, the court issued an order evicting him from the minister's residence.[310]

Tőkés refused to comply with the court order. Instead, he moved into the sacristy of his church, even as pressure against his congregation intensified. In late October, officials interrogated and beat a congregation member and arrested a close friend of Tőkés on charges of "profiteering with food."[311] Then, on November 2, four masked men, brandishing knives, broke into the church and assaulted the minister, who fought back and sustained a head injury, while his wife and three-year-old son took refuge behind a door. Tőkés reacted to the assault in a taped message smuggled into Hungary during November: "We were victims of attempted murder, and we haven't had a moment's rest ever since."[312] At the end of November, the police repeatedly took him away and threatened him with fictitious crimes.[313]

Armed guards and plainclothes police surrounded the Tőkés' residence, preventing nearly all human contact with the minister. Family members attempting to visit him were taken off the train even before they arrived in Timișoara/Temesvár, interrogated, threatened, and sent back on the next train out under police escort. So pervasive was the surveillance that armed police officers shadowed him even as he conducted a funeral service. Nevertheless, he continued to preach on Sundays, though the authorities terrorized many parishioners into staying home. Since, in the eyes of the authorities, he resided in the house "illegally," Tőkés was deprived of firewood and food

[310] "Biography of Bishop László Tőkés" (Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, April 16, 1990), HHRF Archívum, 15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK, BACKGROUND TO THE PERSECUTION OF REV. LASZLO TOKES 12-18-89.
[311] Ibid.
[312] "Gyilkossági Kísérlet Történt Tőkés László Református Lelkész Ellen," n.d., "Hungarian Monitoring, 11 November 1989", 11 November 1989 [Electronic record]. HU OSA 300-40-8-127-1; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Hungarian Unit: Monitoring; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest., http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:e4dd226e-a0f6-4ef4-a394-daf37eb32bbf.
[313] "Biography of Bishop László Tőkés"

ration tickets. Finally, in early December, the Securitate summoned Tőkés and informed him that he and his family would have until December 15 to vacate their home.[314]

On December 14, a day before the eviction, a small crowd gathered at Tőkés' residence. By December 16, hundreds, including Hungarians, Romanians, and clergy members of all faiths, formed a human chain around his residence in an unprecedented demonstration of solidarity with the beleaguered minister. During that day and the next, the crowd grew to thousands and became an anti-government protest. Although Tőkés begged the group to disperse and go home, there was no going back. The Securitate and later the army moved in with rubber truncheons, tear gas, water cannons, but the crowd would not be dispersed. Finally, as city-wide unrest was on their way, on the night of December 17, the Securitate took Tőkés away by force to his new designated place of service, Mineu/Menyő, a small village in the Northwest of Romania. On that day, fighting also broke out in Timișoara/Temesvár with live ammunition. Less than a week later, the Ceaușescu regime fell, and the *annus mirabilis* happened in Romania.[315]

Tőkés' dissident figure grew day by day in the days of the revolution. Just as the name of Fukuyama cannot be left out of any analysis of regime changes in East-Central Europe, so Tőkés's name could not be left out of any news report that explored the outbreak of the revolution. As the Western papers discovered his activity before 1989, they called him a human rights activist. *The Times* took over the minister's attack from the Hungarian press and published it as a background story of his harassment. Since HHRF and HPT described him as a dissident in their informational materials, at least from 1985, and their reports inundated Western editorial offices, the papers

[314] "Biography of Bishop László Tőkés"
[315] Ibid.

started to call him a "dissident priest whose eviction sparked the brutal crackdown."[316] However, Tőkés was also actively seeking transnational solidarity, so he sent letters to Helmut Kohl, chancellor of West Germany, and Lech Wałęsa, chairman of the Polish Solidarity. Wałęsa responded to the letter, received on December 15, that "I appeal to all people … to take up common action in defense of clergymen Tőkés, to express solidarity by exercising international pressure on (the) Romanian authorities."[317]

Tőkés' dissident figure had a duality: he was both the best known ethnic Hungarian dissident and the least complete figure since his name did not appear in the Western press until December 1989, at the last moment of state-socialist regimes. Tőkés's dissent focused solely on church matters until 1988, when he stood up against the most pressing issues of the ethnic Hungarian community: the newly announced plan to raze thousands of villages and large-scale emigration. In addition to the fact that it seemed the village destruction was indeed taking place, which deeply hurt him because on the one hand would have led to the liquidation of congregations and, on the other hand, further assimilation of ethnic Hungarians, Tőkés stepped out of the ecclesiastical framework and joined a subject to which the attention of the West audiences was heightened. With this action, Tőkés became, for the first time, able to meet Western expectations of *dissidentism*. He showed open, non-violent oppositional activity, acquired domestic fame through years of protest, and had international contacts based on transnational networks, mainly to dissident interpreters such as HHRF and HPT.

[316] "Hundreds Reported Dead as Battle Rage on in Bucharest," *The Times*, December 23, 1989, link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0501793983/TTDA?u=ceu&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=bd38ec7d.
[317] Andrew McEwen, Martin Fletcher, and Peter Guilford, "Poland Joins the West in Condemning Supression," *The Times*, December 20, 1989, link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0501793270/TTDA?u= ceu&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4845099a.

After his continuing harassment and planned eviction brought people to the streets, making him the "spark of the revolution." Tőkés's name could not be left out of any news report that explored the outbreak of the Romanian Revolution, so his figure as a "dissident priest" and human rights activist grew large. Tőkés was also actively seeking transnational connections, which strengthened his image, and he sent letters to Helmut Kohl, chancellor of West Germany, and Lech Wałęsa, chairman of the Polish Solidarity. Tőkés quickly converted his newly found fame as a dissident into seeking political roles in the early days of the Romanian democracy.[318] In an interview with *Bild*, he already declared that "[p]eople have suggested I should become a (government) minister, but I am a priest, not a politician. But if that is what the people want, then I say yes."[319] However, as he stated, ten years after the revolution, he thought that he could not become Havel or Wałęsa because of his ethnic Hungarian origin.[320]

[318] In 1990, Tőkés has been also elected as bishop.
[319] "Dissident Priest Supports 'just' Execution," *The Times*, December 30, 1989, link.gale.com/apps/doc/IF0501794773/TTDA?u=ceu&sid=bookmark- TTDA&xid=0fbcd785.
[320] Donald G. McNeil Jr., "Romania's Revolution of 1989: An Enduring Enigma," *The New York Times*, December 31, 1999, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/31/world/romania-s-revolution-of-1989-an-enduring-enigma.html.

CONCLUSION

The story of dissidence in East-Central Europe is unimaginable without considering its deep entanglements between various national contexts, dissident groups, and actors in its most active decade and a half between 1975 and 1989. Dissidence was a transnational phenomenon under a Western gaze. Westerners were involved in the facilitation of dissent and labeling certain activities and figures as "oppositional," leading to their identification as dissidents. This thesis touches on many aspects of this phenomenon and uses dissidence to refer to multiple aspects. First, dissidents were viewed in the West as primarily intellectual figures who conducted an open, non-violent, oppositional activity against the regime, acquiring having domestic fame and infamy, resembling a public figure. Second, the dissident was a figure whose action needed to be interpreted and amplified for Western audiences. Third, the interpretation, part, and parcel of dissidence, has legitimized dissidents and interpreters. How did Western interpretation help create dissident figures in the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania? This thesis addressed this question through multiple perspectives and argued that ethnic Hungarian dissidence in Romania revolved around five dissidents figures whose activities the New York-based Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) interpreted and actively shaped.

In Chapter 1, I problematized the questions of the ethnic minority, diaspora, and dissidence. Hungarian minority elites, despite the drastic deterioration of the situation of the minority, preserved a degree of their agency in Romania. However, the channels of ethnic claim-making, a possibility to negotiate with majority political actors through personal, intra-party relations or petitioning, were severely restricted for them from the second half of the 1970s. Thus, a few people supplementing the ethnic clam-making started to engage in dissidence and sought Western attention to pressure the Romanian government. In the thesis, I argued that dissidence was a

political form of resistance and a discursive concept of the West applied to East-Central European Others. Using an ideal-typical model called a "dissident triangle," the chapter presented the conditions of "dissidentism," a term encompassing both the act of dissidence and its Western interpretation. The chapter argued that newly emerging dissident personages among ethnic Hungarians needed interpreters in the West to make their struggles comprehensible and important. Supplementing the literature that delegated this task to recent emigres, the chapter showed that the Hungarian minority relied on the assistance of the Hungarian diaspora, a much broader category than emigres, including their descendants. In the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania, two interconnected dissident interpreter organizations emerged, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), and its intermediary, the Hungarian Press of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Magyar Hirügynökség*), who almost totally monopolized the discourse on dissident activities of the Hungarian minority in Romania from the late 1970s up until the liberalization of the press in Hungary in 1988. The chapter complexified the theory of dissident interpreters, arguing that the dissident interpretation became a two-step process that encompassed the self-legitimization of these organizations because of the Hungarian minority's complicated situation.

In Chapter 2, I presented the emerging dissidentism of Károly Király amidst the general turmoil of 1977, when "the forgotten *annus mirabilis*" brought with it challenges to state-socialist regimes. Király was banished and harassed for his letters to RCP's leadership as a former high-ranking party member. He accused the RCP of a "tendency to forcefully assimilate the nationalities living in Rumania" and cited a host of discriminatory and oppressive measures but stayed inside the party rhetoric throughout. The chapter presented the Western press's selectiveness when it came to dissident figures. The chapter pointed out that becoming a dissident figure is not an unequivocal process. Even though the dissident interpreter HHRF set out to create a dissident

figure from Király, who showed all the signature elements of a dissident, the Western press did not seem interested in him as a dissident. Instead, they concentrated on the security policy issue posed by a potential conflict between Hungary and Romania and emphasized the maltreatment of the Hungarian minority. Several factors undermined the chance for Király to become the next Havel or Michnik. On the one hand, Király's strong party background prevented him from fully adopting the human rights discourse used by other dissidents in the region. On the other hand, his isolation by the Romanian regime meant that he could not contact others through transnational networks. The chapter concluded that although Király's case managed to activate the Hungarian diaspora community, who showed Ceaușescu the worst of times with their New York protest, Király only wrote letters to the authorities about his condition once he was isolated.

In Chapter 3, I studied how the first Romanian samizdat journal, the *Ellenpontok* (*Counterpoints*), pictured as a significant act of dissidence, influenced the decisions of the CSCE Conference in Madrid on minority and human rights issues with the aid of HHRF in 1983. The chapter also emphasized how the samizdat was an example of a transnational endeavor based on cross-border relations of a small intellectual group whose members, based on their activity, became acknowledged as dissidents by various international actors. On the other hand, the chapter focused on Géza Szőcs, the only editor of *Ellenpontok* who remained in Romania after the 1982 dissolution of the samizdat and the expulsion of the other editors. Although Szőcs remained to fill the gap in the dissident activity left by Király and the samizdat, the chapter emphasized that dissidence is not a linear process where one evolves from petitioning to turning to international forums but can take many different forms. Szőcs' submission to the RCP signaled a return to older methods of dissent but at the same time singled him out as the only dissident from Romania. Solely based on this fact, HHRF could elevate him to other East-Central European dissidents at such dissident meetings as

the 1985 Budapest Alternative Forum. The chapter also presented that despite the literature's claim that no one was opposing the regime's anti-feminist policies, Szőcs did protest them and became a controversial feminist. However, his intention to exploit the cause of feminism to propagate the issues of ethnic minorities reduces his merits. Finally, the chapter asked where the women from ethnic Hungarian dissidence in Romania were and argued that they primarily dealt with the logistics of dissent and male dissident figures overshadowed them.

In Chapter 4, I have outlined the duality of Reverend László Tőkés's dissident figure. I argued that he was both the best-known ethnic Hungarian dissident in the West and the least exhaustive one since his name did not appear in the Western press until December 1989, at the last moment of the existence of state-socialist regimes in East-Central Europe. The chapter presented that Tőkés's initial dissidence focused solely on church matters, but in 1988 he stood up against the most pressing issues of the ethnic Hungarian community: the newly announced plan to raze thousands of villages and large-scale emigration. As a result, Tőkés stepped out of the ecclesiastical framework and joined a subject surrounded by increased Western media attention. With this action, Tőkés became, for the first time, able to meet Western expectations of dissidentism. He showed open, non-violent oppositional activity, acquired domestic fame through years of protest and had international contacts based on transnational networks through the dissident interpreters of HHRF and HPT. After his continuing harassment and planned eviction brought people to the streets, making him the "spark of the revolution." This chapter showed that news reports could not omit Tőkés's name of any piece that explored the outbreak of the Romanian Revolution, so his figure as a "dissident priest" and human rights activist grew large. Tőkés was also actively seeking transnational connections, which strengthened his image, and he sent letters to Helmut Kohl, chancellor of West Germany, and Lech Wałęsa, chairman of the Polish Solidarity.

The thesis focused on the creation of dissident figures among ethnic Hungarians in Romania. However, important aspects are missing from my research. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of time and space and my humble language skills, I could not tackle the situation of Hungarian minorities in other state-socialist countries or ethnic other ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, this thesis hopes to inspire further scholarly work on transnational dissent and the creation of dissident figures among ethnic minorities. An interesting aspect of future research might be how ethnic Hungarian dissidents in other state-socialist countries related to each other and uncover if they had been part of the same transnational networks. A critical study could also be commenced on what strategies other ethnic minorities in state-socialist countries chose to oppose regimes and if dissident figures emerged among them.

The thesis has argued that ethnic Hungarian dissidence was a transnational endeavor involving Western audiences and dissident interpreters. Although there were several oppositional activities among the Hungarian minority performed by men and women, HHRF singled out four male oppositional actors and a samizdat, whose entirely male editorial staff created a dissident figure around them in the period under discussion. By doing so, they followed Western conventions on dissident figures. However, HHRF's goal of making them household names in the West was only successful for Tőkés, the "dissident priest," whose international fame could not be completed, for it became known only for its role in the regime change. His later remorse that he could not become a Havel or Wałęsa because of his ethnic Hungarian origins is valid in the case of the other four dissident figures. However, they were not victims of ethnic discrimination, but because of the structural shortcomings of the Western media ("one country, one dissident" simplification), they did not receive attention despite having all the factors of the "dissident triangle."

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13. SZEMÉLYEK

15. HHRF BESZÁMOLÓK ÉS KÜLDEMÉNYEK

19. NEMZETKÖZI SZERVEZETEK

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