

## The Catalan example

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Although it was not unexpected but still came as a shock when the *Krónika* of Kolozsvár (Cluj Napoca, Romania) reported yesterday morning: the Romanian Senate rejected the proposal for autonomy of Szeklerland (52 votes against, 5 votes for and 2 abstentions), which would have organized Hargita (Harghita) and Kovászna (Covasna) Counties, and a part of Maros (Mureş) County, into an autonomous region within the country.

The proposal was brought forward by RMDSZ (Romanian Hungarian Democratic Alliance) representatives Dezső Becsek-Garda and Csaba Sógor in June of 2005, only to have the House of Representatives vote down the proposed bill a few months later.

The committees of the Senate had earlier recommended rejection of the proposal on the grounds that it is obviously in opposition with the provisions of the Romanian Constitution, according to which Romania is a sovereign, independent, unified and indivisible nation state, that is to say, national sovereignty is the privilege of the Romanian people, exercised through elections by its freely elected representative bodies.

The report tabled by the legal and public administrative committees of the Upper House also stressed that no group or individual may not exercise sovereignty, in spite of the fact that the proposed autonomous region would have a unique public administrative and regional character, governed by distinctive political and administrative institutions (local and district councils, district committees). According to the committees' report, the intent of the authors of the proposal was the creation of a region where independent institutions, commercial companies, boards of trade, police, a system of social security and internal public administration would be set up, to be recognized by the constitution. The proposal was voted on, and rejected, by the House of Representatives in October of 2005.

Prior to that, in March of 2004, the RMDSZ representatives tabled in Parliament a statute proposal for an autonomous Szeklerland, which was rejected without debate by the House a month later, and by the Senate on June 29.

It would be pointless to argue now how 54 Romanians, with a parliamentary mandate, hold as idiots, as second, third or fourth class unfortunates, a total of 15 million Hungarians. If in eight (or twenty-three) years this is as far as we got, so be it, but the decision of the Romanian Senate also had another message: we must change our strategy and tactics -- and soon -- if we ever want to see the day when Bucharest ceases to dictate to the Szeklers how to organize our lives.

Starting now, it is pointless, or carries only a secondary role, if we want to achieve self-rule for Szeklerland through various proposed plans and statutes. At the same time, it also sheds light on the insubstantial power of the RMDSZ parliamentary faction. Hence, if finally there does not emerge true, Transylvanian-Hungarian unity, similar to the Catalans -- and not merely in the

matter of the Székely Mikó College but for autonomy – then, when we are old and gray, we will still be debating: where did we go wrong, or when should we have shouted in time for a new deal.

During my recently ended trip in Szeklerland, I saw a product called ‘chocolate croissant.’ Obviously, the fine bakers of Csikszereda (Miercuera Ciuc) were attempting to market their crescent rolls under this name, after the common breakfast fare of the French. But why this loud Catalanism? On the one hand, because the 30,000-strong demonstration for the Mikó College was attributed by the RMDSZ organizers to the valiant people’s staunch support. On the other because, in early September, the mayors of 40 Catalan settlements simply exchanged the signs on town squares pertaining to Spain and installed ones reading Independence Square. This dare to Madrid came about in spite of the warning by the President of the European Commission, the Portuguese José Manuel Barroso, that, in case of a declaration of independence, they will not be deemed as citizens of the European Union.

Thus, the action is not to burn straw effigies of Avram Iancu. We must accept that Bucharest will only be persuaded to action by genuine unity. I can only hope that soon the Szekler bakers will be selling their traditional crescent rolls in their shops but also, at the very least perhaps, they forget to remit their taxes for a month or two, say.

I think I know Barroso’s response to this move. But then the RMDSZ, or anybody else, can honestly refer to the Catalan example.

But not until then.