

# **Demographically Relevant Pressure Directions In Harghita And Covasna. The Resurgence Of Hungarian Biopolitics In The Center Of Romania And The New Ethnopolitics (Part One)**

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## ***Abstract:***

The present paper aims to examine the pressures faced by Romanian and Hungarian communities in their mutual relations in the Harghita-Covasna area and their impact on the demographic situation. We will highlight the sociological (stigma) and geopolitical criteria expressed in the ethnopolitical concept used by the Hungarian state in its policy in the area, seeking to observe and assess their effectiveness.

***Keywords:*** *demographic success, biopolitics, ethnopolitics, Transylvania;*

## **1. Brief introduction. purpose of the paper and conceptual clarifications**

This article seeks to outline the relationship between geopolitics – in its ethnopolitical aspect – and the demographic phenomenon in the counties of Harghita and Covasna. It focuses on the economic, cultural, and administrative policies run (mostly) by the Hungarian state, especially on their financial import, which varies according to which ethnic group is targeted – and how they affect the demography of Hungarian and Romanian communities in two counties. These policies are based on a particular geopolitical concept: the "geopolitics of the Carpathian Basin". Unlike traditional Hungarian biopolitics of the 1930s, this approach now involves financial support from Bucharest. Ethnopolitics, a branch of geopolitics, works to strengthen and expand statehood by supporting the ethnic group that legitimizes it. We will clarify the difference between biopolitics and ethnopolitics using the theories we analyzed and our own research.

Thus, in order to understand what is happening in the two counties, we will attach demography – the science of population, ethnopolitics, more precisely, to Hungarian biopolitics. This approach allows to consider the visible/probable kinetics that come conjoined to government funding. Such dynamics can encourage or discourage cultural, economic, and administrative processes and phenomena, depending on the budgets allocated, which, in the medium and long term, can have implications for demographics. Hungarian officials believe that they could even halt the demographic decline of the Hungarian population. However, we cannot ignore the fact that funding policies, both from Budapest and even from Bucharest, constitute primarily a source of pressure on the two communities. This pressure produces different effects on the ethnic communities affected by it. It leads to the weakening of

the Romanian community, engendering a behavior of abandonment on the side of Romanians, while, at the same time, the strengthening of the Hungarian-speaking population's presence in the Carpathians.

Beyond the specific features of each context, the literature on Romanian communities subjected to politico-institutional pressures shows that stigmatization, restricted access to resources, and identity insecurity can accelerate patterns of withdrawal, migration, and abandonment (Otovescu, Păsătoiu & Cioacă, 2020).

To gain the sought understanding of the relationship between geopolitics/ethnopolitics and demographics, it is necessary to monitor the effects of administration on the population of Harghita and Covasna, and to examine them. In this context, administration is defined as being the result of three factors. These are: a local administration based on ethnic criteria, the Hungarian geopolitics of the "Carpathian Basin", and last but not least, a Romanian administration that continuously refuses to exert its constitutional prerogatives. All three are sources of pressure and tension that impinge upon the local communities, the result thereof being an ideological division (for now) between the Hungarian and Romanian communities, with the former becoming the dominant majority and the latter a dominated, discriminated local minority (Baltasius, Săpunaru and Bulumac, 2013).

## 2. Biopolitics yesterday and today

The issue of the relationship between power and the demographics of a precisely circumscribed geography is not new, having been theorized by Kjellen as early as 1917 (Kjellen, 1953, p. 3, apud Bădescu and Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 16). The theory was further developed and reconfigured by Andrei Korponay and Paul Vida during the interwar period. They wrote two works that provided the foundation for the "new science" of biopolitics, with significant titles: *Husz millió Magyart* (We Need 20 Million Hungarians), published in 1941 by Magyar Nemzetbiologiai Intézet (Hungarian Institute of Ethnic Policy), and *Magyar Karpatmedencét* (The Carpathian Basin Must Be Inhabited by Hungarians), published in September 1941 in the magazine *Kárpátmedence* (The Carpathian Basin).

Biopolitics, Korponay argues, seeks to achieve the "healthy multiplication" (Korponay apud Golopenția, 1942, p. 27) of the Hungarian people, meaning a process of ethnic reproduction, "without mixing", "for can we imagine that Transylvania or the southern territories will remain ours again, as long as the Romanian and South Slavic peoples maintain their current advantage?" (Ibidem, p. 32). According to the Hungarian author, biopolitics is best suited to explain the dismantling of Hungary in 1919 and, since it has identified the true cause thereof, can be used to turn back the wheel of history'.

Karponay argues that biopolitics must become state policy: "The fundamental condition for Hungarian revival, for the new ascendancy of the Hungarian people, is 'the ruthless elimination of population policy based on the chimera of assimilation and the foundation of Hungary's future on the numerical strengthening of ethnic Hungarians: accepting the Hungarian biopolitical idea as a state program'" (Korponay apud Golopenția, 2001, p. 586). In other words, the essence of Hungarian biopolitics is to strengthen Hungarian demographics by shifting the emphasis from the assimilation of other ethnic groups to "Hungarian ethnic reproduction", as specialists

such as Csata Istvan, Kiss Tamas, Szilagyi Sandor (\*\*\*, *Demographic Perspectives...*, p. 46 and *passim*), etc.

Korponay argues that all 20 million Hungarians, which existed in his times, must populate... the Danube Basin, including the Carpathian Basin. To achieve this biopolitics desiderate, Korponay calls for the acceptance of the biopolitical idea as a state program" (Korponay apud Golopenția, 1942, pp. 19-35, apud Didă, 2015, pp. 9-10). The Romanian sociologist Anton Golopenția "translates" this biopolitical project into demographic language, showing that Korponay's desired increase in the Hungarian population means achieving a natural growth rate of 18 per thousand, equivalent to a birth rate of 32 per thousand, i.e. at least six children per family. This plan is, of course, a utopia, but this does not prevent Paul Vida from taking it up and "improving" it. In his work *Magyar Karpatmedencet*, he proposes the occupation of the Carpathian Basin by ethnic Hungarians. The idea is stated directly at the beginning of the work, followed by several proposals for achieving this goal. Vida speaks of the "natural assimilation" of non-Hungarian elements, with "newcomers" to be considered as legitimate as ethnic Hungarians; He also talks about the need to repatriate Hungarians from Europe and other parts of the world, as well as bringing in populations related to the Hungarians from their whereabouts in the Asian heathlands (Didă, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Golopenția's conclusion is that all these utopian plans actually reveal "the fundamental difficulty of Hungarian political aspirations. The claim to rule all the territories that belonged to Hungary in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire is not upheld by the social realities of the present" (*Ibidem*). Since the demographic growth envisaged cannot be achieved, if Hungary persists in applying this biopolitics, it will only achieve demographic growth "on credit": by resuming the old policies of assimilation, colonization, or repatriation of Hungarians (Golopenția, 1942, p. 35).

The year 2018 was proclaimed by officials in Budapest as the "Year of Hungarian Families," with subprojects such as "The Umbilical Cord" and "Baby Obligations," with investments in education, childbirth, health, economic activities, etc. (Hirado, 2018).

Apparently, the new Hungarian demographic policy does not have the supremacist component of Horthy's biopolitics, although the school curriculum and cultural projects supported by the government suggest otherwise, and the provisions of the new Administrative Code, which the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania insisted on so much, confirm this.

### 3. The new Hungarian ethnopolitics

If biopolitics represents a state's pursuit of projecting its power outside its border by supporting the demographics of its own ethnic group on the territory of other states and forcibly assimilating other peoples, ethnopolitics offers a more subtle approach, in the sense that it considers demographic policies to which cultural policies are added restricting other populations development and rights in this process, while its own ethnicity becomes overrepresented in terms of identity and culture. In order to successfully practice ethnopolitics, co-sovereignty is required, namely the de-sovereignization of the legitimate state power on the territory targeted by the expansionist (aggressor) state (Baltasius, 2022). Ethnopolitics represents a

partial return to the techniques of forced assimilation from the period of Austro-Hungarian dualism, with the caveat that the "forced" aspect is less evident: by making the administrative, intellectual, and law enforcement elites mentally and spiritually dependent on the expansionist center, assimilation no longer appears to be forced, but is part of a large-scale operation to stigmatize the feeling of belonging to the legitimate state and one's own country (today, it is not good in Transylvania to show yourself as Romanian, but there is no problem in being a Transylvanian nationalist or displaying symbols of Hungarian oppression, even if they are fascist ones).

According to statements made by its own officials (Potápi, 2019), the Hungarian state has been systematically pursuing an ethnopolitical agenda for around 10 years, with a threefold objective:

1. Preserving the Hungarian community by halting demographic decline by 2030, a government objective initiated in 2011. In this regard, the Hungarian government is taking measures that far exceed in complexity, scope, and subtlety not only the actions of the Romanian government in this area, but also the paradigm of raising the issue at the level of "Romanian civil society," which is in a curious extended vacation regarding demographic collapse. Thus, Hungary is taking economic, cultural, and social assistance measures in favor of the social unity that is the family, including the informational one, all within the Hungarian geopolitical perspective of the Carpathian Basin. Árpád János Potápi, the Hungarian government's secretary of state responsible for national policy, recently stated: "The Hungarian government has been working for over eight years to support families and encourage young people to become parents, explained Árpád János Potápi and the positive signs are already beginning to show. If we can continue on this path, we hope that by 2030 the demographic decline will stop and there will then be an upward trend" (Ibidem).

2. The instrumentalization of the Hungarian community as a factor in geopolitical construction by treating it as an "invented community" – an aspect discussed elsewhere (Baltasiu, Săpunaru, and Bulumac, 2013).

3. Blocking the return of the Romanian element to the area by practicing the administrative medievalism of the "three privileged nations" in Transylvania, which excluded the Romanian factor as an element with equal rights. We are referring to the demographics of local government, which is predominantly non-Romanian, an aspect exacerbated by the provisions of the new Administrative Code. Experts in local public administration in Harghita-Covasna pointed out in 2018 that: "There are currently dozens of public institutions where no Romanians are employed (and never will be). Town halls, schools, cultural centers, etc., all without a single Romanian employee. This situation has been made possible mainly by Article 108 of Law No. 188/1999, which states that 'In administrative-territorial units where persons belonging to a national minority account for more than 20% of the population, some civil servants in services that have direct contact with citizens shall also know the language of the national minority in question'" (Tanasă, 2018).

Last but not least, analysis of the figures reveals the strange situation whereby the Romanian state's financial efforts in the two counties are subordinate to... precisely this foreign and hostile geopolitical project.

#### **4. Demographic alarm factors in Romania**

From a demographic point of view, Romania has faced a progressive decline due to the following factors: massive emigration, a very high number of abortions, declining birth and marriage rates, an increasing number of deaths, and demographic aging. Of these, emigration and abortions are the two factors that have the greatest influence on the community. According to official figures, there are approximately five million Romanians living outside Romania's borders (Digi 24, 2019), but according to unofficial figures provided by various organizations of Romanians working abroad, the Romanian diaspora numbers approximately seven million Romanians (Caleap, 2018). Worth considering is the intention to return of those who left, which according to Cezar Caleap is less than 10% (Dan, 2018). A United Nations report shows that between 2000 and 2015, Romania had the highest growth in the diaspora worldwide, if we do not consider Syria, our country being second in a global migration ranking, after Syria, a country ravaged by civil war (Realitatea, 2017). According to official figures, in 2017, the intensity of emigration was one Romanian every three minutes, with an average of 600 Romanians per day (Iosip, 2019). These figures are all the more significant given that the largest number of those leaving are in the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups (Cuzub, 2018), i.e., people who make up a large part of the workforce, but also the most fertile age groups. In absolute terms, the counties that lost the most inhabitants were: Bucharest – almost 90,000 people, followed by the counties of Bacău – 78,155 people, Suceava – over 70,000, and Neamț – almost 70,000 (Bechir, 2016).

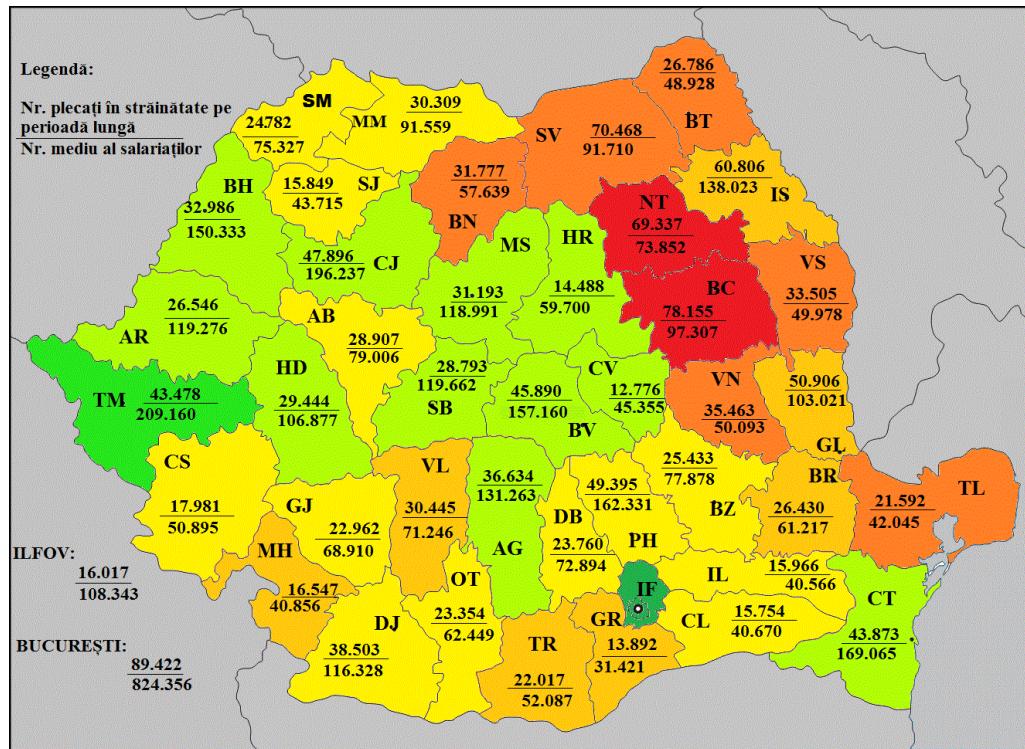


Figure 1. Map of emigration by county (2016) (Ibidem)

We note that the two counties, Harghita and Covasna, have relatively low emigration rates, with the ratio between those who left and those who remained employed ranging between 28.16% (Covasna) and 24.26% (Harghita) (Ibidem), while the highest rates at the national level are found in Neamț (93.88% ratio of those who left/employees) and Bacău (80.31%). Overall, the population of Harghita and Covasna seems relatively more settled in the territory, but if we could extrapolate the results of repeated research conducted by CESPE in Toplița between 2012 and 2013, we could infer that more than half of the Romanian population is affected by emigration (European Center for Ethnic Studies of the Romanian Academy, 2013, p. 11), in the sense that there are many families affected by the departure of members. Older Hungarian quantitative studies show that the Romanian population has a migration coefficient twice as high as that of the Hungarian population (Csata and Kiss, n.d., p. 43). It follows that, in terms of actual emigration and the desire to emigrate, the Hungarian population seems much more settled than the Romanian population.

Along with the mass emigration of people of working age, another factor contributing to Romania's demographic decline is abortion: "Data published in 2012 by the World Health Organization show that Romania has the highest abortion rate in Europe: 480 abortions per 1,000 births, which means that almost half of all conceived children are aborted, a rate more than twice the European Union average" (Mediafax, 2016). According to the Ministry of Health's Center for Calculation, Health Statistics, and Documentation, it is estimated that between 1958 and 2008, 22,178,906 children were aborted in Romania (Bălan, 2018), which means that over a period of 50 years, the number of abortions exceeded the current population of the country: on January

1, 2019, Romania's population was 22,171,000 people (National Institute of Statistics, 2019). Under these circumstances, according to the president of the National Institute of Statistics, in the next 30-40 years, Romania's population is likely to reach 14-15 million inhabitants (Economica, 2016), of which only two million will be children (Constantin and Cochină, 2003). By county, the evolution of the birth rate over the last 20 years, presented by econtex.ro, shows that the birth rate has declined even in Moldova, where the birth rate was the highest (Jurnalul, 2011):

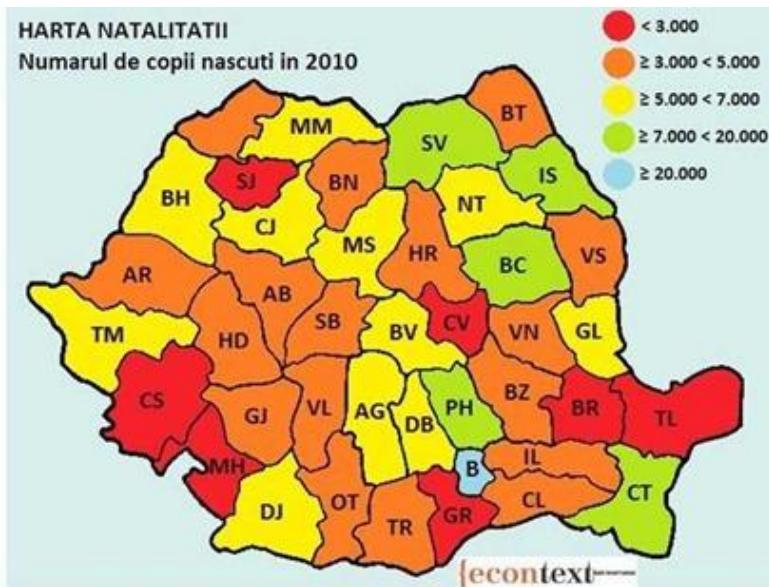


Figure 2. Birth rate trends between 2000 and 2010 (Ibidem)

According to the 1992 census, there were 1,624,959 Hungarians in Romania, representing 7.1% of the total population, which at that time stood at 22,810,035 (National Institute of Statistics, n.d.). The number of ethnic Hungarians in Romania reached 1,431,807 in 2002 (6.6% of the country's population) (National Institute of Statistics, 2002), in 2011 to 1,227,623 people (6.1% of the country's population) (National Institute of Statistics, 2011), and in 2021 to 1,002,151 (6% of the country's population) (National Institute of Statistics, 2021). Most Hungarians live in the northwestern region of Romania, in Transylvania, and form the absolute majority in Harghita (85%) and Covasna (75%) (Corbii Albi, n.d.).

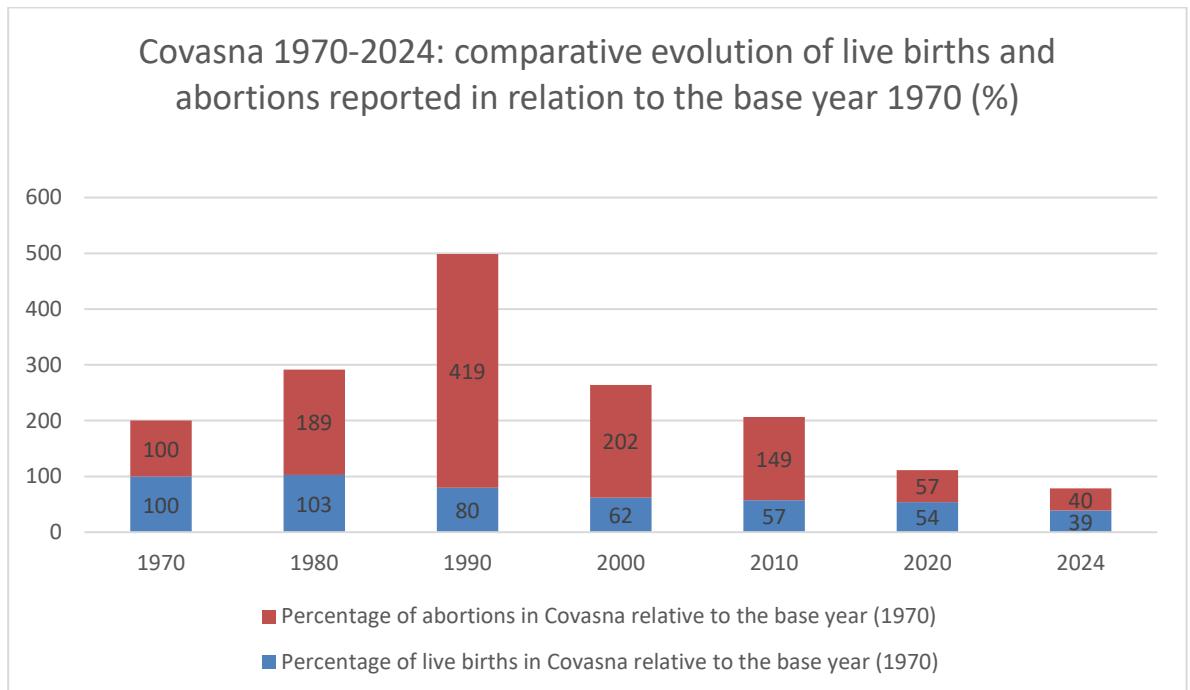
Even though they are less affected by emigration, Harghita and Covasna are strongly affected by the decline in birth rates. The actions of the Orban government in Hungary have failed to halt the decline of the Hungarian population in Transylvania, which has seen the following dynamics: it fell by 16% in 2021 compared to 2011, while until its establishment in 2010, it fell by 14% between 2002 and 2011. If we take 1930 as a benchmark, the Romanian population of the current Covasna county had grown by 40.6% in 2021, while the Hungarian population had grown by 14%. Compared to 1930: the Romanian population in the Harghita county area had grown by 34% in 2021, while the Hungarian population had grown by 7%, while in Mureş, the Romanian population had grown by 36% in 2021, and the Hungarian population had decreased by 6.8%. If we take Viktor Orban's assertive rise to power in Budapest

(2010) as a benchmark, in Covasna, the Romanian population fell by 8% in 2021, while between 2001 and 2011 it fell by 14%; Hungarians decreased by 14% in 2021 compared to 2010, while between 2011 and 2001 they decreased by 11.7%. In Harghita, the Romanian population decreased by 22.5% between 2011 and 2021 and by 26.7% between 2001 and 2011, while the Hungarian population decreased by 11.8% between 2011 and 2021 and by 8.46% between 2011 and 2001. During the nationalist Orban government, Hungarians have higher rates of population decline.

Although the Orban government has been running aggressive propaganda and support programs based on ethnic criteria since 2010 – aimed exclusively at the Hungarian/ Hungarianized population (the Székelys), amounting to over one billion euros (Investigative Report, 2020) – the local population continues to decline of its own accord (abortions). Thus, until recently, the two counties had among the lowest birth rates and, at the same time, were among the highest in the country in terms of abortions. In 2010, 55 out of every 100 babies were aborted, with Covasna being the county with the highest abortion rate in the country (1,270 per 1,000 live births, compared to the national average of 574) (Ziare, 2010). In 2015, Harghita County also recorded an abortion rate of 500 per 1,000 births (Harghita Public Health Directorate, 2018, p. 14), above the national average of 480 abortions per 1,000 births (Mediafax, 2016). In 2024, 30,000 children were aborted in Romania, representing a rate of 6.5 per thousand, while in Hungary the rate was 9.2 (Popa, 2025). Other data show that in Romania the abortion rate was 228 per thousand live births, while the abortion rate in Harghita was 22% above the national average (278 per thousand live births), and in Covasna 38% above the national average (314 per thousand live births). In 2025, the abortion rate in Bucharest was 5.1 per 1,000 women of childbearing age (300 per 1,000 births), while in Covasna it almost doubled, reaching 488 per 1,000 births (Dan, 2025). However, there is a consequence of these policies: the abortion rate has fallen significantly in relation to births in both Covasna and Harghita, with the difference between them being marginal in Covasna in 2024 (40 per thousand abortions compared to 39 per thousand births, down from 149/57 in 2010), while in Harghita, in 2024, we already have a higher birth rate than abortion rate – 26/39, much better than in 2010, when we had 66 abortions per thousand compared to 53 per thousand births. From this point of view, the efforts of the Orban government have been successful. On the other hand, compared to the situation in Romania, the absolute data show us:

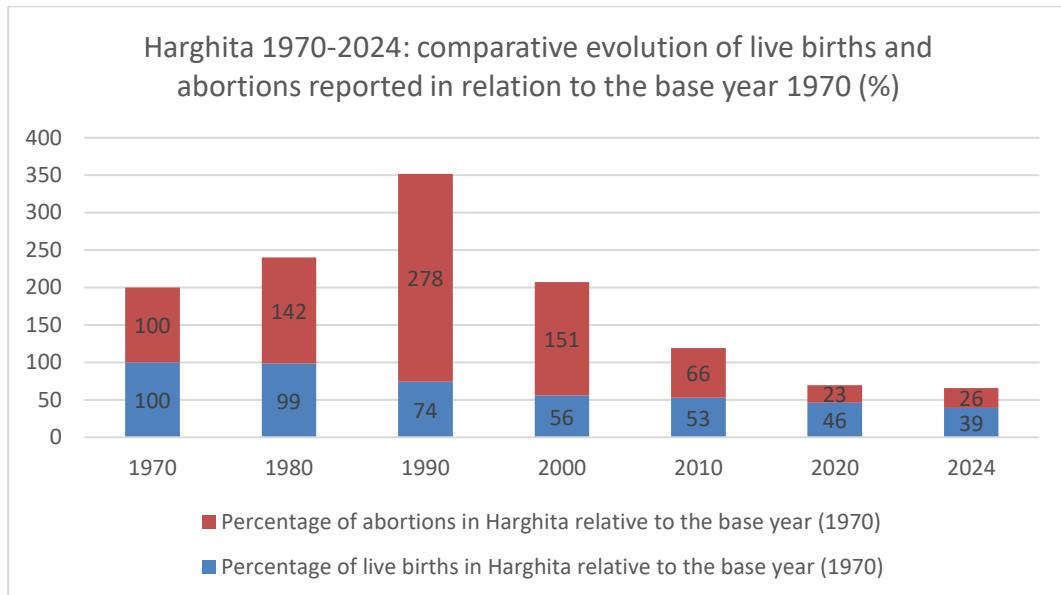
- In 2010:
  - Romania: 101,915 abortions to 212,199 births, a ratio of 0.48
  - Covasna: 2,611 abortions to 2,468 births, a ratio of 1.05 – more than twice as many abortions as births
  - Harghita: 1,930 abortions to 3,542 births, a ratio of 0.54
- In 2024:
  - Romania: 29,697 abortions to 148,916 births, a ratio of 0.19
  - Covasna: 693 abortions to 1,671 births, a ratio of 0.41
  - Harghita: 770 abortions to 2,624 births, a ratio of 0.29

All this shows that in 2024, compared to 2010, the aggressive decline in the population of Covasna caused by abortion was stopped, and Harghita approached the national average, but the downward trend in abortions compared to the number of births is general throughout Romania.



**Figure 3.** Covasna 1970-2024: comparative evolution of live births and abortions (Johnston, 2025).

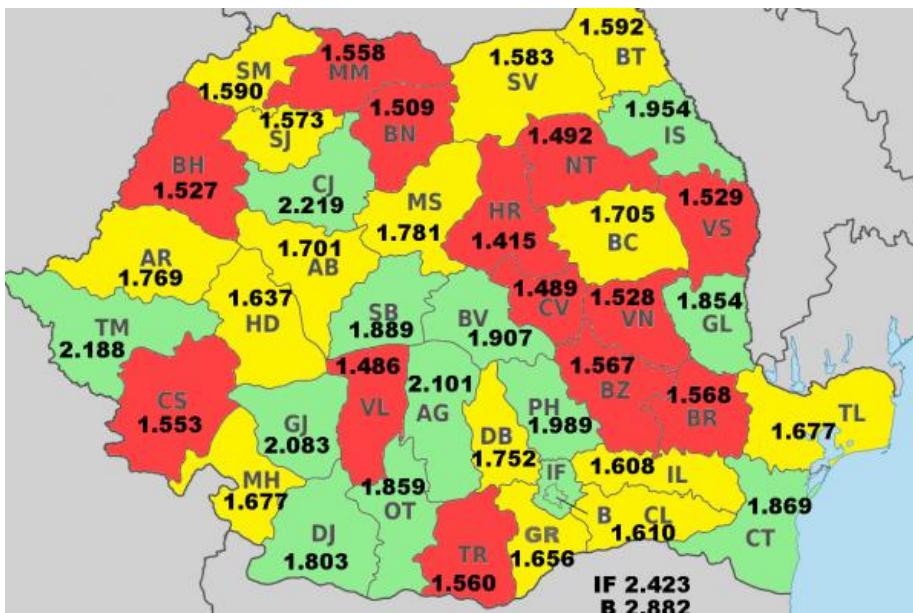
We clearly observe that abortions are more prevalent than births in Covasna, even though they have decreased significantly in the last 10 years, while in Harghita births outnumber abortions per thousand inhabitants.



**Figure 4:** Harghita 1970-2024: comparative evolution of live births and abortions (Ibidem).

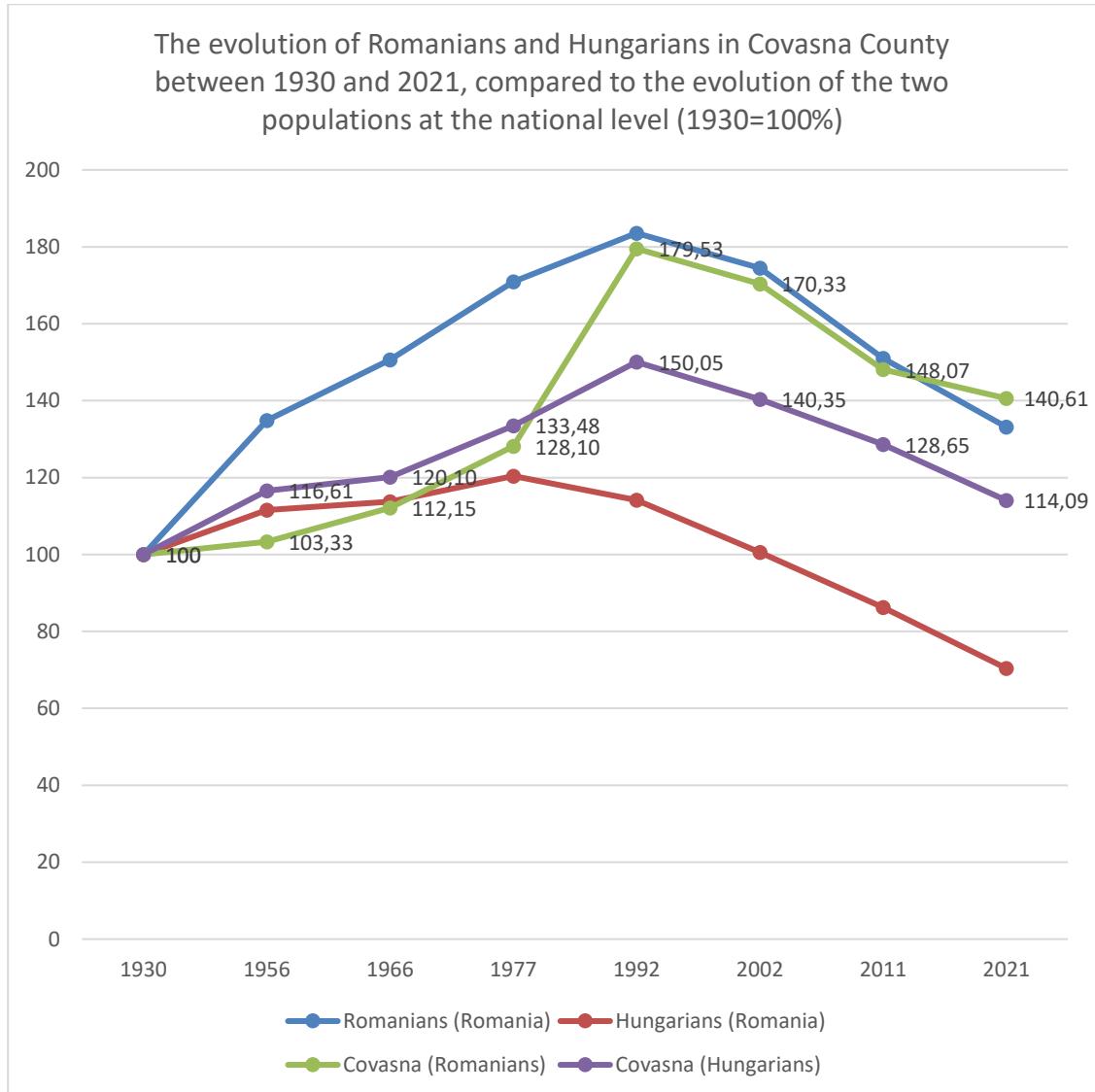
Another factor influencing demographics is family income, as we assume that this phenomenon is stimulated by the financial support provided: the European Commission points out that in Romania, approximately 20% of employees do not earn enough to make ends meet. Romanians earn several times less than employees in Central and Eastern European countries. Thus, Romanians are at the bottom of the European rankings in terms of salary earnings. Moreover, in 2016, the counties with the lowest salaries in our country were Harghita and Covasna, which ranked third from last (Covasna – 1489 RON) and last (Harghita – 1415 RON) (Daily News, 2017). As a result of Victor Orban's policies, the situation began to change: "after 10 years, the GDP per capita in Covasna is €20,100 per year, and in Harghita €21,000 per year. They are followed by the following counties: Suceava, Neamț, Bacău, Vrancea, Galați, Moldova, Buzău, Ialomița, Călărași, Giurgiu, Teleorman, and Dâmbovița in Muntenia, Olt in Oltenia (with Mehedinți below Harghita and on par with Covasna), Satu Mare, Maramureș, and Bistrița in Transylvania" (Peiu, 2025).

Of course, GDP does not necessarily represent the wealth of the population, but rather the flows passing through those counties.



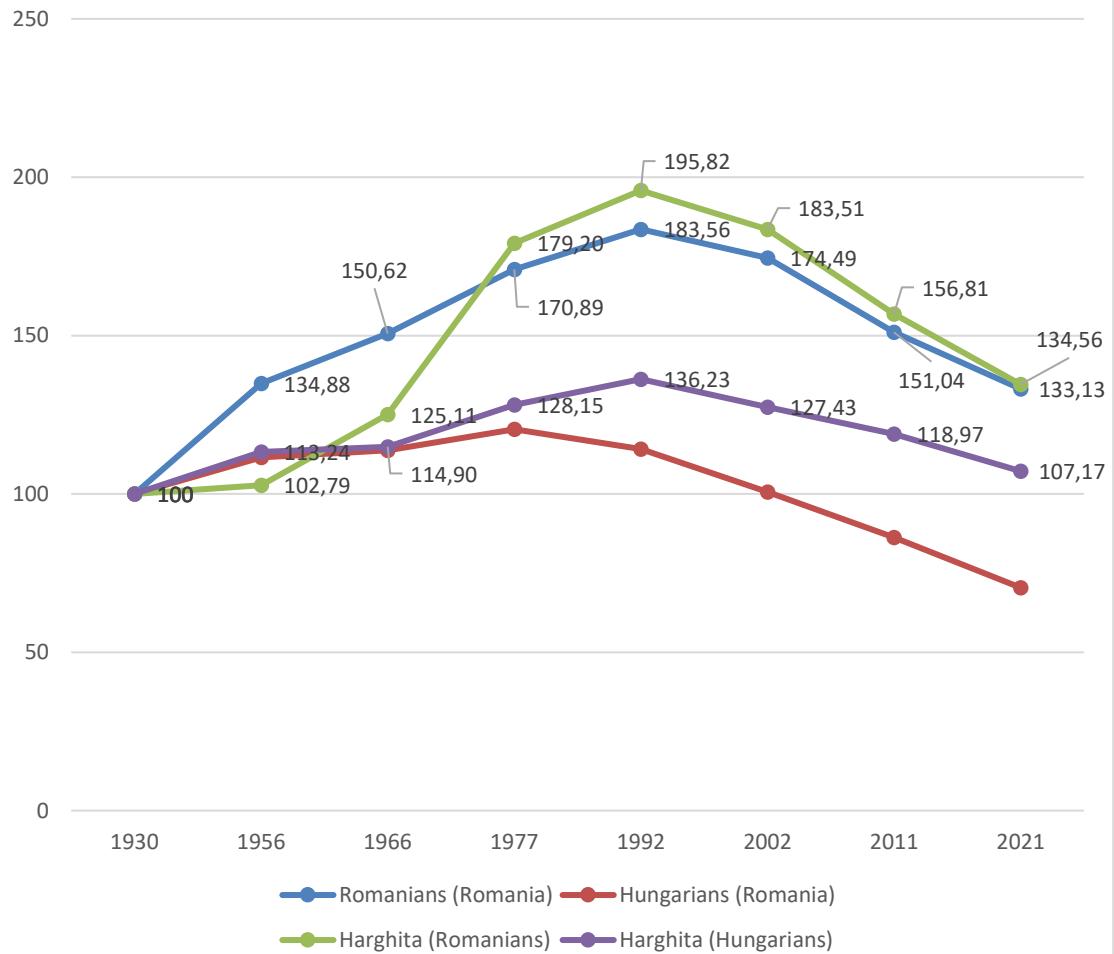
**Figure 5.** Map of salaries by county, in 2016 (Daily News, 2017).

On the other hand, we note that the evolution of the Hungarian population, especially in Harghita and Covasna, is slightly atypical, in the sense that the slow decline in the Hungarian population is not so closely correlated with the general decline in the Hungarian population throughout Romania. Instead, the Romanian population in the three counties follows exactly the general trend of a relatively steep decline.

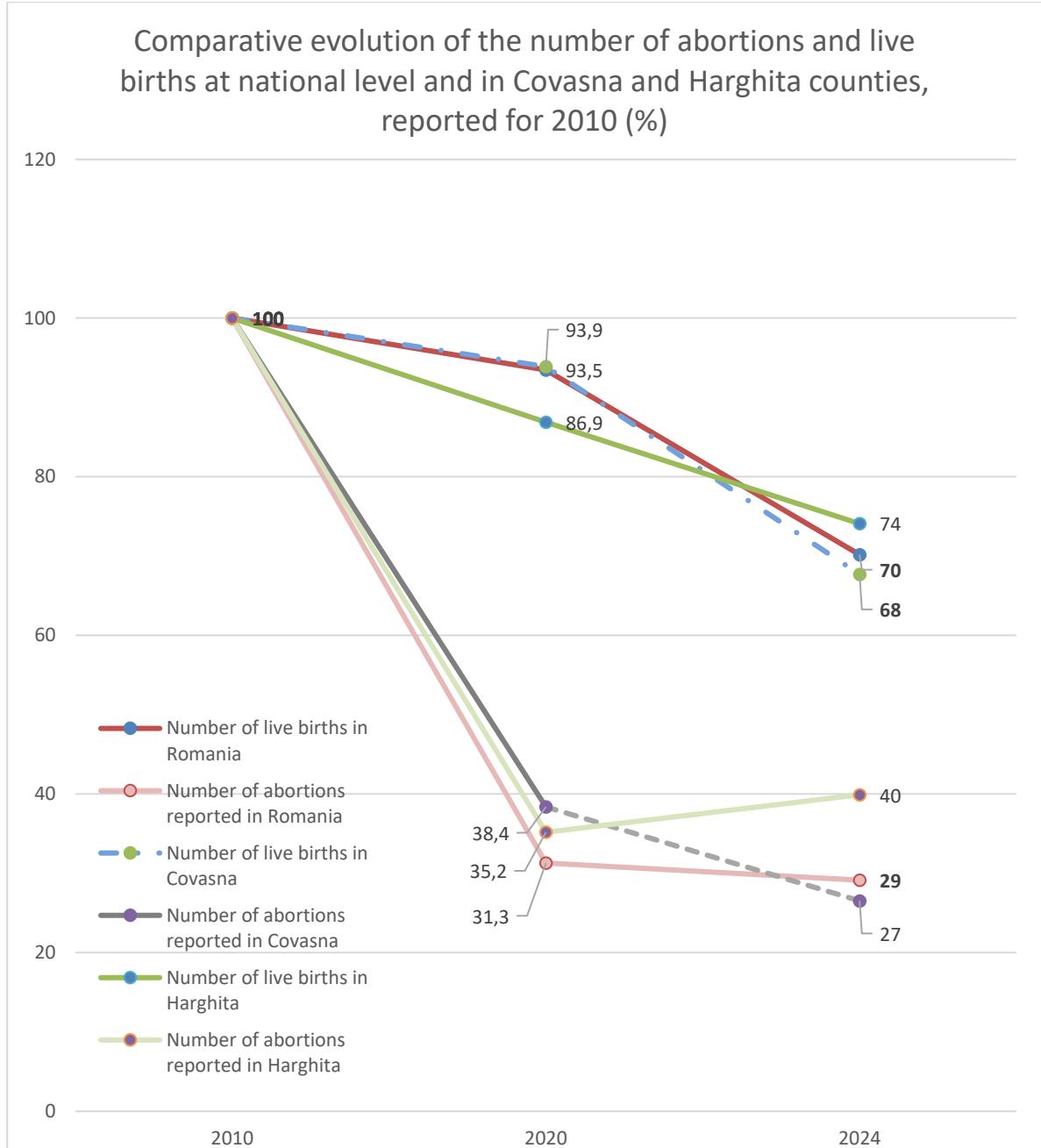


**Figure 6.** Evolution of Romanians and Hungarians in Covasna County between 1930 and 2021, compared to the evolution of the two populations at the national level (1930=100%) (National Institute of Statistics, 2021b). Compared to 1992, the Romanian population in Covasna has decreased by 38.93%, and the Hungarian population by 35.96%.

The evolution of Romanians and Hungarians in Harghita County between 1930 and 2021, compared to the evolution of the two populations at the national level (1930=100%)



**Figure 7.** Evolution of Romanians and Hungarians in Harghita County between 1930 and 2021, compared to the evolution of the two populations at the national level (1930=100%) (Ibidem). The decline in the Romanian population is 61.26% in 2021 compared to 1992, and that of the Hungarian population is 29.06% in the same period. It can be seen that the decline in the Hungarian population in Harghita is clearly more limited than the overall decline in Romania's population, including that of Hungarians in the rest of the country



**Figure 8.** Comparative evolution of the number of abortions and live births at national level and in Covasna and Harghita counties, reported for 2010 (%) (Johnston, 2025)

When analyzing the overall figures, we observe that, despite Budapest's strong demographic, economic, political, and geopolitical support policies, compared to 1930, the Hungarian population in the three counties has declined significantly, while the Romanian population, lacking any support, was still holding its own in 2011, a situation that continued in 2021. On the other hand, based on church records,

His Holiness Andrei of Harghita and Covasna stated at the beginning of 2019: "After requesting the reports from the archpriests of the four archpriesthoods of our diocese, I was left with a heavy heart. I asked the state institutions to provide me with a census, which they were unable to do because the Romanian state has not been able to conduct a census since 2011. Do you know how much we have declined? We currently have 50,030 Romanian believers. Our diocese has declined by 30,000. I wonder, if we continue at this rate, where will we end up?" (Drăghici Taraş, 2018). This concern on the part of the high-hierarch shows that, at the level of subjective perception in important institutions such as the Church, there is a strong concern about population decline.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper deals with the relationship between geopolitics, with an emphasis on its ethnopolitical aspect, and demographic dynamics in the counties of Harghita and Covasna. In this first part, we have addressed the influence of economic, cultural, and administrative policies, more precisely their financial consistency, which varies according to the criterion of ethnic affiliation, on the demographics of the Hungarian and Romanian communities in the two counties. The data analyzed clearly showed that the actions of the Orban government in Hungary failed to stop the decline of the Hungarian population in Transylvania, while also affecting the demographics of the Romanian community. In the second part of the article, which we will publish later, we will address the issue of differentiation and ethnic pressure factors in the two counties, as well as the collective inferiority complex and stigmatization of the Romanian population.

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