

Subsidized Autonomy: Funds Allocated By The Romanian State To The Hungarian Democratic Union Of Romania (Udmr) Through The Council Of National Minorities (1994-2025)

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Abstract:

This article examines the hypothesis that the Hungarian Democratic Union Of Romania (UDMR) has pursued a long-term ethnopolitical strategy aimed at gradually enforcing an autonomous regime in certain parts of Transylvania, a process indirectly sustained through public funding allocated by the Romanian government itself. The research is based on a Freedom of Information request submitted under Law 544/2001 to the Department for Interethnic Relations (DRI), which provided an official record of all state subsidies granted between 1994 and 2025 to organizations representing ethnic minorities in Romania. The dataset reveals that UDMR and its affiliated structures received over 662 million lei, equivalent to approximately 133 million euros in today's value, during this period. These funds have been adjusted for inflation and analyzed in correlation with the evolution of the national currency to assess their real economic impact. The study argues that this continuous financial support facilitated the consolidation of an informal system of parallel institutions, cultural networks, and local power structures in Transylvania, contributing to a de facto form of autonomy in Hungarian-majority areas. The article situates these findings within the broader theoretical frameworks of desovereignization and internal borders, contextualizing them through UDMR's historical trajectory, policy positions, and recent public statements advocating for the autonomy of the so-called "Szeklerland." The results highlight a paradoxical dynamic in which state-funded mechanisms reinforce ethnopolitical separatism under the guise of cultural support.

Keywords: Transylvania; borders; ethnocracy; autonomy; subsidies.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR) has established itself as the main political and cultural organization of the Hungarian minority, with an almost uninterrupted presence in parliament and government. Currently representing less than one million citizens according to the 2021 census, or approximately 6% of the population, UDMR has participated in multiple governing coalitions, assuming the status of "political arbiter" to advance Hungarian interests in Transylvania. Although this role has ensured constant representation of Hungarians at the central level, some analysts argue that UDMR has gone beyond the framework of the Romanian Constitution, acting as an instrument for autonomy in the region, often supported directly by a foreign government, that of Hungary to be precise. This plan involves the gradual desovereignization of Romania in areas with Hungarian populations, by obtaining step-by-step ethnopolitical concessions which, when combined, weaken the Romanian state's authority within its own territory. The strategy is called *the "policy of small steps"* (Kantor, 2013), indicating the incremental

achievement of autonomist goals, so that each separate step seems minor and legitimate, but the cumulative effect leads to the creation of a *de facto* autonomy.

The quest for autonomy by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) in Transylvania has developed within a framework that both challenges and benefits from the institutional mechanisms of the Romanian state. This paper explores a paradoxical dynamic that is frequently ignored in official discourse. The analysis raises concerns regarding the relationship between state support and minority mobilization by examining how claims for autonomy have been expressed and promoted through avenues that require systemic involvement.

Theoretically, the operational foundation of any autonomist movement is the availability and mobilization of financial resources, which goes beyond political rhetoric and symbolic gestures. One of the main, though not the only, sources of funding for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) has been the state budget, which has been crucial in maintaining institutional and community-level initiatives related to autonomy claims.

Further, throughout this paper, the particular issue of direct state-funded financial support will be addressed: between 1994 and 2025, UDMR and its affiliated foundations received hundreds of millions of lei from public funds, money directed annually from Bucharest under the pretext of supporting cultural identity through the Council of National Minorities and its predecessor structures. In fact, these sums have fueled a parallel institutional network, an ecosystem controlled exclusively by UDMR, which has gradually replaced the presence and authority of the Romanian state in counties with a Hungarian majority population.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the autonomy promoted by UDMR is an autonomy subsidized by the Romanian state, where the state entity finances a group that openly advocates for territorial dismemberment and local autonomy. The Romanian state was not passive, but a sponsor; it was not deceived, but an accomplice through its lack of rigor and absence of control. These funds, vaguely justified and used in a non-transparent manner, have allowed the consolidation of UDMR's hegemony in Hungarian communities and have created the material basis for an identity project disguised as minority protection. In other words, Romania paid from its own budget for the symbolic and institutional deconstruction and its own marginalization in Transylvania, this financial dimension of autonomy must finally be exposed in clear, quantifiable, and verifiable terms.

Research on ethnic communities indicates that collective identity is reproduced not only through symbolic narratives, but also through organizational infrastructures that sustain cultural continuity and community cohesion. In this perspective, processes of identity reconstruction depend on institutional networks (associations, media, educational and cultural initiatives) and on the resources that enable their ongoing functioning, especially under conditions of geopolitical pressure and interethnic competition. Consequently, public funding mechanisms may operate as instruments of cultural preservation and participation, but they can also become structural enablers for the consolidation of parallel community ecosystems,

depending on their transparency, governance, and political capture (Otovescu, Păsătoiu, & Cioacă, 2020).

2. Theoretical Framework

Sovereignty vs. desovereignization. In the classical sense, state sovereignty implies the unrestricted exercise of authority on national territory, without external interference in internal affairs. Any illegitimate transfer of authority, whether to external entities or to parallel unconstitutional structures, amounts to a loss of sovereignty. Sociologist Dan Dungaciu has addressed the concept of Romania's "desovereignization" in Transylvania, describing how the authorities in Budapest act directly through UDMR, bypassing the Romanian state, in order to impose their own agenda in this region (Dungaciu, 2020). We observe how "the Hungarian government's direct partner in Transylvania is UDMR; Budapest decides the direction, UDMR executes the plan, and Budapest moves on to implementation", a relationship through which the Hungarian state acts "without intermediaries" on the territory of another state, diminishing its sovereignty (Baltasiu, 2019). Essentially, Budapest is arrogating powers and rights that it does not have over Transylvania, taking advantage of the passivity of the authorities in Bucharest. Thus, the Hungarian state is gradually "inserting" its presence in Transylvania, without any explicit permission, attribution by attribution, in the face of silences that become tacit acceptances (Baltasiu, 2020: 15). This gradual dynamic is vividly captured by Dungaciu through the metaphor of physical intrusion:

"First it sticks in its nails, then all its fingers, then its whole hand, followed by its arm (...) up to the shoulder"

until Hungary's presence on the ground becomes so solid that it claims to be recognized as a co-decision-maker in the internal affairs of the area. Conceptually, we are facing a de facto "co-sovereignty" of Transylvania: the authority of the Romanian state is partially replaced by the authority of UDMR-Budapest network.

Internal borders and ethnocracy. Theorists of border geopolitics (Ilie Bădescu, Radu Baltasiu, etc.) have analyzed the phenomenon of ethnic segregation and the emergence of "internal borders" in multi-ethnic societies. In the monumental work "Sociology and Geopolitics of the Border", we observe that Transylvania manifests a "Hungarian geopolitical paradigm" that treats this province as part of *the* Hungarian "Carpathian Basin", while the Romanian state has neglected to develop its own internal geopolitics. The consequence is that the Romanian space comes under the influence of a foreign geopolitical logic: *"the Romanian border moves inward"* when the Hungarian community in Transylvania is drawn to the periphery of Hungary through the construction of local autonomies based on ethnic criteria. This paper also explains the resulting phenomenon of "country within a country", which leads to the emergence of *"exclusive minorities"*, ethnic communities that disconnect themselves from the national context and develop their own parallel structures. This form of ethnocracy (the domination of ethnic logic to the detriment of common citizenship) erodes state cohesion, as the loyalty of the minority population is diverted to ethnic leaders and, implicitly, to another state. Ultimately, the state tacitly

renounces its attributes of sovereignty in those areas, leaving room for a form of unofficial autonomy. Bădescu (1995) summarises this process as

“the entry of the Romanian border into the non-Romanian geopolitics of the Carpathian Basin”

In other words, Bucharest is outsourcing some of its functions to UDMR and Budapest.

“The policy of small steps”. This gradual strategy was identified by Romanian observers as early as the 1990s as part of the post-Trianon Hungarian revisionist project. It consists of a succession of progressive claims and actions, each presented as benign or as an act of justice for the minority, but which cumulatively advance the goal of autonomy. The most obvious example is the evolution from cultural rights to territorial claims: initially, the use of the Hungarian language in administration and education was requested, then their own symbols (the Szekler flag, the Szekler anthem) in public spaces, then statutes of cultural autonomy, and now there are explicit demands for territorial autonomy for the so-called “Szeklerland”. Each “small step” has set a precedent and pushed the limits of acceptability further. Romanian analysts believe that UDMR and its partner organizations (the Szekler National Council – CNS, the Bethlen Gabor Foundation, etc.) have acted in a coordinated manner in this direction, periodically testing the vigilance of the Romanian state. A pattern of action by the Orban government is noticeable: Budapest takes advantage of Bucharest’s weaknesses and passivity “*an introverted, reactive state with no plan*” (Dungaciu, 2020) to impose a policy of *fait accompli* in Transylvania, to the point where challenging these gains becomes difficult or too late. This gradual tactic explains why autonomy based on ethnic criteria, although firmly denied by the Romanian Constitution, continues to reappear in public discourse: each preliminary element, such as schools, universities, separate funding, symbolism, Hungarian citizenship, etc., was obtained separately and presented as harmless, but all together they outline the infrastructure of full autonomy.

3. History of Funding

A key aspect of the influence strategy is the financial resources made available to UDMR and the institutions it controls. Paradoxically, a large part of these resources came from the Romanian state itself, through mechanisms for financing national minority organizations. Based on legislation adopted after 1994, UDMR, as a cultural union of citizens of Hungarian nationality, receives substantial public funds annually. While in the mid-1990s the amounts were modest, for example, in 1994 UDMR received ~180 million old lei (approx. 18,000 lei in current value) (as presented in DRI Address no. 925/23.05.2025), in subsequent years the funding increased exponentially. In 2010, UDMR received approximately 15.18 million lei from the budget, an amount ~39 times higher than in 2000. The upward trend has accelerated recently: the period 2019-2025 has seen a doubling of allocations for Hungarian organizations, from approximately 29.4 million lei in 2019 to ~64.3 million lei in 2025. Double-digit annual increases have been recorded consistently (e.g., +24% in 2022, +12% in 2023), so that UDMR and affiliated foundations such as the Communitas Foundation and the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania (SMCT)

now account for more than a fifth of the entire budget allocated to minorities. In other words, the Romanian state generously finances the cultural and educational infrastructure of the Hungarian minority through schools, publications, events, and higher education institutions, in a declared effort to ensure the preservation of ethnic identity and interethnic peace. and in addition to this state infrastructure, millions of lei are granted annually to a political party for non-transparent expenses and its own objectives.

Some theorize that this funding is often granted by the authorities in Bucharest in the hope that it will “buy ethnic peace”, thus preventing the radicalization of separatist movements and offering the Hungarian community the satisfaction of concrete rights and resources. However, the price paid was the consolidation of informal autonomy under the control of UDMR. With substantial funds at its disposal and monopolizing their distribution to schools, NGOs, and Hungarian-language media, UDMR has managed to control almost entirely the public life of Hungarians in Transylvania. UDMR leaders often made the allocation of resources conditional on political support, creating a “totalitarian communist-style unity” among the Hungarian electorate, as accused by political rivals within the community (PPMT, PCM) (Cosmeanu and Balogh, 2005). By stifling alternative funding, any internal opposition to UDMR was marginalized, and the organization imposed its political hegemony over the entire minority.

At the same time, direct financial support from Hungary increased exponentially after 2010 as part of Viktor Orbán’s policy of strengthening ties with *Hungarians abroad*. The Hungarian government, through funds such as the *Bethlen Gábor* Foundation, has invested heavily in Transylvania: it has financed churches, schools, and kindergartens, Hungarian farms and NGOs, awarded scholarships to pupils and students, and even sponsored local sports teams (Macarie, 2018). For example, in Satu Mare County, the Hungarian state carried out projects worth ~€9 million between 2017 and 2020, targeting the Hungarian community, while the Romanian state invested ~€419 million in the same county (2015–2020). Even though the figures show a much greater contribution by Bucharest to local development, the community’s perception is often the opposite: interviews with people from areas governed by UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) state that

“the Hungarian state is 100% more present than the Romanian state (...). Hungary invests, it wants to show that in Transylvania there is something Hungarian above the Romanians. The Romanian state is not very present, I don’t understand why” (Baltasiu, 2020: 37).

These perceptions confirm the long-term strategy in the predominantly Hungarian-populated counties of Transylvania, where the Pro Economica Foundation, funded by the Hungarian government, has awarded thousands of grants to Hungarian farmers, strengthening economic dependence on Budapest. Romania has generally tolerated these capital infusions, even supplementing them with its own funds, but without clear coordination and concrete evidence of the neighboring state’s investments (Scarlat, 2022). The result is the emergence of areas where the Romanian state’s presence feels diluted, and the population’s loyalty goes

predominantly to the leaders of UDMR and, implicitly, to Hungary. In practice, Bucharest has ended up indirectly subsidising its own marginalisation through internal funding and the acceptance of external funding, fueling the development of a parallel system in which UDMR and Hungary dictate local politics, while the Romanian authorities are mere spectators.

4. UDMR's Ethnopolitical Strategy

UDMR has officially defined itself as a cultural organization of the Hungarian minority, but it acts *de facto* as an ethnic party with well-defined political objectives. Its ethnopolitical strategy combines participation in government to obtain leverage and resources with identity activism to meet the community's expectations regarding autonomy. UDMR has skillfully sought to maximize the advantages in both directions: on one hand, it has been a relatively moderate and predictable partner in the governing coalitions in Bucharest, avoiding direct confrontations on sensitive issues in exchange for obtaining discreet legislative benefits; on the other hand, it maintained an autonomist discourse at the local and international levels, constantly supporting the need for *cultural autonomy* and even a form of *regional autonomy* for Hungarians in Transylvania. (For example, UDMR is one of the initiators of the ICE Minority Safe Pack, alongside other autonomist groups in the European Parliament.)

An important tactic was to use to their advantage positions in the central administration to promote the interests of the minority. In the governments after 1996, UDMR held portfolios (culture, environment, development, etc.) and positions (deputy prime minister, secretaries of state, county prefect) through which it was able to direct public policies and funds to areas with Hungarian populations. Its influence in the state apparatus was complemented by intense legislative lobbying: UDMR initiated or supported laws such as the Education Law (which extended the right to mother-tongue instruction at all levels), the Local Public Administration Law (which formalized the use of Hungarian in local institutions in territorial-administrative units where Hungarians exceed 20%) and projects for the establishment of confessional educational institutions in Hungarian (see the case of the Roman Catholic Theological High School "II. Rákóczi Ferenc" in Târgu Mureş). Each of these achievements was presented as a gesture of democratic normality, but also strengthened the infrastructure of a cultural autonomy.

At the same time, UDMR exercised an informal *political veto* by systematically blocking initiatives considered contrary to the interests of the Hungarian community. For example, it opposed administrative reorganizations that would have dissolved the identity of the so-called "Szeklerland" by including the counties of Harghita and Covasna in a larger region and protested against the creation of a Hungarian-language educational institution in the county of Harghita (Economedia, 2024), protested against the adoption of *the Day of the Treaty of Trianon* as a national holiday (Andrei, 2020) seen as an affront to the Hungarian community, and internationalized disputes over language rights, appealing to European organizations to put pressure on Romania (Popescu, 2024). This dual attitude, cooperative at the center and combative at the periphery, has generated the perception of a double

agenda on the part of UDMR. Within the Hungarian community, UDMR leaders have cultivated nationalist and conservative ideas, constantly evoking the ideal of autonomy, but without excesses that would jeopardize the Union's position in the government.

It should be emphasized, however, that UDMR was not just a passive beneficiary of Budapest's plans, but an active actor. Numerous actions support this assertion, such as frequent and unofficial consultations between UDMR leaders and Hungarian officials, the participation of members of the Hungarian government in political events on Romanian territory alongside UDMR, and the synchronization of messages and demands. A telling example is the habit of Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó of holding press conferences at UDMR headquarters in Transylvania, side by side with Union leaders, an unusual gesture whereby a foreign dignitary uses the platform of a local party to convey political messages. *Hungarian officials speak to Bucharest from the headquarters of a political party in Romania*, even though such a practice defies diplomatic protocol and amounts to interference in internal politics (UDMR, 2022). In the same spirit, Budapest has encouraged Hungarian parties in Romania to demand autonomy and has sent high-ranking emissaries to separatist events to give these actions international weight (Hot News, 2018). Far from dissociating itself, UDMR has always been a co-organizer and host, signaling its alignment with the objectives set by the "mother country".

This paradoxical situation, in which a party in power in Romania collaborates with a foreign government against the interests of its own state, is a source of tension at the regional level (Agerpres, 2025). In other words, formally, UDMR and its members of parliament swear allegiance to Romania, but on the European stage or at political meetings, it challenges Bucharest's policies, posing as *a victim* to justify demands for territorial autonomy. This duplicity has eroded trust between the majority and the minority, fueling suspicion that UDMR is acting as Hungary's "Trojan horse" within the Romanian state apparatus (Popescu, 2012).

Over the years, UDMR has adapted its public discourse to suit its audience. In front of the Hungarian electorate, it has kept alive the ideal of autonomy, albeit in cautious terms: *"cultural autonomy"*, *"local self-government"*, *"special regional status"*, etc. In front of its Romanian government partners, it has adopted a moderate tone, insisting that it only seeks *"respect for the rights enshrined in the Constitution and international treaties"*. However, programmatic documents such as the "Cluj Declaration" (1992) or the resolutions of UDMR Congresses explicitly mention the goal of *"territorial autonomy for the Hungarian community"*. Even though UDMR leaders have avoided putting forward an official autonomy bill themselves in the last decade so as not to risk political isolation, they have left this task to satellite organizations and associated parliamentarians. For example, in December 2023, two deputies elected on UDMR lists but members of another party, Zakarias Zoltan and Kulcsar-Terza Jozsef Gyorgy from the Hungarian Alliance of Transylvania (AMT) and the Hungarian Civic Force (FCM), respectively, submitted three bills on the autonomy of the so-called "Szeklerland", both territorial and cultural, formally on their own initiative (Eremia, 2023). However, it is difficult to believe that this move was not

known and tacitly approved by the Union's leadership. Through such indirect actions, UDMR maintains its position of possible denial in front of its Romanian political partners, but simultaneously conveys to the Hungarian community that it has not abandoned its ultimate goal.

5. Financial allocations to UDMR and lack of transparency

Between 1994 and 2025, the Hungarian UDMR party and the organizations it controls, namely the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania (SMCT) and the *Communitas* Foundation, received hundreds of millions of lei from the state budget, according to data provided by the Department for Interethnic Relations (DRI address no. 925/23.05.2025). This funding is part of the Romanian state's general policy of supporting national minority organizations with a view of "protecting cultural and linguistic identity". However, the case of UDMR is distinguished both by the high level of funds received and by the lack of transparency in their management. Between 1994 and 1996, UDMR received the funds directly, then in 1997, UDMR and the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania (SMCT) received part of the funds, with the SMCT taking over the funding in 1998-2000. In 2001, the funds were divided between the SMCT and the *Communitas* Foundation, with the latter taking over the funding between 2002 and 2008. Since 2009, UDMR, as the representative organization of the Hungarian minority, has taken over the management of these funds, effectively replacing the previous role played by the *Communitas* Foundation. Thus, between 2009 and 2025 alone, UDMR received over 330 million lei directly, while the budget allocated to national minorities increased from 143 million lei in 2020 to 296 million lei in 2025. UDMR has benefited from a constant percentage of 21-22% of this total, making it the largest beneficiary among all minority organizations.

However, journalistic investigations indicate an extremely low level of transparency. According to an investigation by *Átlátszó Erdély*, in 2016, UDMR refused to provide public data on the use of the money, arguing that it was not subject to the provisions of Law 544/2001 on access to information of public interest. The journalists' requests were rejected, even though the managed funds came exclusively from the state budget. The situation even led to legal proceedings to clarify UDMR's obligations in terms of transparency. However, journalists managed to gain access to the documentation submitted by UDMR to the DRI for a short reporting period. This documentation showed that the amounts allocated were justified summarily, often by a single one-page form (Form A3), in which expenses of hundreds of thousands of euros were described in a few words (Sipos, 2016). For example, the purchase of a €200,000 property in Bucharest was described by the phrase "Bucharest property", with no supporting documents, contract, or land registry extract.

Other examples show unusual costs: in 2012, UDMR declared travel expenses of over €90,000, equivalent to 12,000 days of travel within the country. In the same year, €145,000 was spent on fuel, equivalent to over 110,000 liters of fuel, enough to travel 36 times around the Earth. The salaries of UDMR staff have increased significantly, with the number of employees doubling between 2009 and 2015,

reaching 168 in 2015. Management salaries are significantly above average, given that many positions are part-time. UDMR has also consistently purchased cars and real estate with public funds. Between 2009 and 2015, UDMR bought 24 cars, including a €51,000 VW Multivan and a Honda Accord for the party leader. UDMR's headquarters have benefited from massive investments. In 2011, €1.9 million was spent on maintenance and renovations alone, an amount that theoretically and realistically far exceeds what would be logically necessary for 40 headquarters, most of which are modest in size.

Following pressure from the independent press, in 2016 UDMR and the Communitas Foundation tentatively began to publish some data but refused to respond to official requests for public information. The case went to court, with journalists asking whether UDMR is obliged to comply with Law 544/2001 on access to public information (Sipos, 2019). At the same time, the verifications carried out by the Department for Interethnic Relations are limited to the consistency of the figures, without analyzing the legality or structure of the expenses. The Court of Auditors did not conduct any audits of UDMR between 2009 and 2015, and in a 2009 report admitted that the current system of justification is “imprecise and inaccurate” and recommended the introduction of a uniform reporting methodology (Romanian Court of Auditors, 2016). This results in an opaque model of ethnic rent-seeking, with the Romanian state allocating generous funds to an organization that manages them with almost complete autonomy, without providing coherent explanations to the public. Although UDMR claims to be subject to controls, in reality, the institutional mechanisms allow for symbolic and formal justification, rather than effective control. This situation contravenes the principles of democratic accountability and fairness in the use of public funds, managing budgetary resources without oversight and in its own political interest.

Between 2000 and 2007, the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR) received public funding as a political party, in accordance with the legal framework established by Law No. 27/1996 on political parties, Law No. 43/2003 on the financing of political activities, and Government Emergency Ordinance No. 8/2007 on elections to the European Parliament. According to letter No. 15C/232/rp/20.11.2008 from the General Secretariat of the Government, the amounts allocated annually to UDMR from the state budget as a party are as follows:

1) Amounts allocated to UDMR as a political party (2000–2007)

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Amount (lei)	389,784	616,938	746,944	746,944	746,944	729,480	729,481	729,481

(letter No. 15C/232/rp/20.11.2008-General Secretariat of the Government, 2008)

In parallel with these allocations as a political party, UDMR also benefited from substantial funds through the Communitas Foundation, an organization it controls, and which was designated as the instrument for distributing public funds to the Hungarian community (Cosmeanu and Balogh, 2005). **The Hungarian Cultural**

Society of Transylvania (SMCT) received the following budget allocations between 1997 and 2001: 1997 – 525,000,000 lei + 500,000,000 lei; 1998 – 1,140,000,000 lei; 1999 – 5,100,000,000 lei; 2000 – 9,500,000,000 lei (DRI address no. 925/23.05.2025)

Furthermore, according to DRI address no. 925/23.05.2025, the amounts collected by **the Communitas Foundation between 2001 and 2009** are shown in the following table. To understand the figures and to accurately report the amounts that fluctuated over the years due to rampant inflation and financial changes, we chose to report the sums in relation to the dollar value at the time, but also to report based on the inflation rate in new lei:

- 944,500,000 lei in 2001 (01.06 – 31.12);
- 1,861,279,000 lei in 2002;
- 3,730,000,000 lei in 2003;
- 50,000,000,000 lei in 2004 (election year);
- 58,520,000 lei in 2005;
- 8,020,000 lei in 2006;
- 10,770,000 lei in 2007;
- 14,250,000 lei in 2008;
- 2.110.000 lei in 2009 (01.01 – 28.02).

2) Amounts received between 2001 and 2009, adjusted to inflation:

Year	Amount ROL	USD exchange rate at that time	USD value at that time	USD value in 2025	Amount in RON	Inflation (RON)	RON value in 2025
1994	180,100,000	1,670	107,784	204,789	18,010	x20.0	360,200
1995	252,140,000	2,033	124,002	235,604	25,214	x17.5	441,245
1997	1,025,000,000	7,150	143,357	272,378	102,500	x12.0	1,230,000
1998	1,140,000,000	8,260	138,014	262,227	114,000	x10.0	1,140,000
1999	5,100,000,000	15,300	333,333	633,333	510,000	x8.5	4,335,000
2000	9,500,000,000	21,700	437,327	831,921	950,000	x7.5	7,125,000
2001	9,445,000,000	29,000	325,690	618,811	944,500	x6.8	6,423,600
2002	18,612,790,000	33,500	555,434	1,055,324	1,861,279	x5.8	10,795,418
2003	37,300,000,000	33,200	1,123,494	2,134,638	3,730,000	x5.0	18,650,000
2004	50,000,000,000	32,500	1,538,462	2,923,078	5,000,000	x4.2	21,000,000
2005	58,520,000,000	29,800	1,963,758	3,731,141	5,852,000	x3.7	21,652,400
TOTAL	191,075,030,000		6,790,655	12,903,244	19,107,503		93,152,863

(DRI address no. 925/23.05.2025)

In order to correctly understand the amounts received by UDMR and its subordinate entities between 1994 and 2005 we need to explain these figures because the value of the leu before the transition to *the new leu* in 2005 was volatile and can be difficult to understand without reporting the amounts. As a result, these entities received significant financial support from the state budget, which, although initially expressed in old lei, take on a completely different weight when updated to the real value of money today. Historical data on budget allocations were converted from ROL to RON using the official 2005 redenomination rate (10,000:1). Values were then adjusted to 2025 equivalents using cumulative inflation coefficients based on the Romanian Consumer Price Index (INS data), and, for comparative purposes, converted into U.S. dollars at the historical exchange rates published by BNR. USD values were further adjusted to 2025 purchasing power using CPI-based inflation multipliers. We are talking about **a total of over 191 billion old lei (ROL), equivalent to approximately 19.1 million new lei (RON), which means an amount of over 93 million RON in 2025 value if we consider the accumulated inflation and denomination that took place in Romania over the last three decades.** Alternatively, in international terms, this money was worth about \$6.79 million at the time it was granted, and adjusted to the current dollar value, it exceeds \$12.9 million.

This financial analysis highlights a paradox: while UDMR promotes autonomy and distancing from the Romanian state, its activities have been financed by the Romanian state itself. Whether we are talking about logistical support, headquarters, cultural projects, or other activities, these amounts have been allocated from the public budget, i.e., from the contributions of all citizens. In a context where “autonomy” is being demanded more and more vocally, the reality shows that, at least in the recent past, this autonomy has been generously budgeted by the center.

Since 2008, based on Law No. 334/2006, the financing of political parties has been taken over by the Permanent Electoral Authority. UDMR received 512,421 lei in 2008 and only 80,122 lei in 2009 under this mechanism, after which, from March 2009, it was no longer funded under party legislation. As a result, since 2009, UDMR has started to receive funds directly from the state budget as an NGO representing the Hungarian community. Thus, in that year, UDMR received 13,072,660 lei, to which was added 2,110,000 lei for the Communitas Foundation. Total public funding for that year exceeded 15 million lei.

During the first period of budget allocations from the government, UDMR received 180,100,000 old lei in 1994 and 252,140,000 old lei in 1995. Between 2009 and 2025, UDMR was funded directly as an NGO, without the intermediation of other foundations. The amounts received were as follows:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| • 2,110,000 lei in 2009 (January - March); | • 24,911,780 lei in 2017; |
| • 13,072,660 lei in 2009 (March - December); | • 26,157,480 lei in 2018; |
| • 15,182,660 lei in 2010; | • 29,436,580 lei in 2019; |
| • 15,987,000 lei in 2011; | • 32,311,890 lei in 2020; |
| • 17,178,000 lei in 2012; | • 36,821,810 lei in 2021; |
| • 18,011,900 lei in 2013; | • 45,695,860 lei in 2022; |
| • 18,558,820 lei in 2014; | • 51,394,610 lei in 2023; |
| • 22,201,080 lei in 2015; | • 58,487,170 lei in 2024; |
| • 22,877,630 lei in 2016; | • 64,335,890 lei in 2025 |
| TOTAL: 536,042,820 LEI | |

This financial evolution reveals a significant increase: from the equivalent of 18,000 lei in 1994 (360,000 adjusted for inflation) to almost 64 million lei in 2025, which is equivalent to an increase of more than 177 times. This increase in funding has taken place against the backdrop of a continuous decline in the ethnic Hungarian population in Romania, from 1,6 million in 1991 to slightly less than 1 million in 2021. Moreover, during periods when the party is in charge of a ministry, the amounts allocated to projects within the Hungarian community increase exponentially. For example, in 2009–2011 alone, in parallel with its funding as an NGO, UDMR benefited from significant resources through the Ministry of Culture. Thus, during Kelemen Hunor's term of office, approximately 7,300,000 lei were allocated for the restoration of Hungarian monuments in the counties of Covasna and Harghita (Roncea, 2015). This alternation between party and NGO status allowed UDMR to consistently access significant public funds without being subject to the same standards of control and transparency. The allocations, which were disproportionate to demographic dynamics, can raise questions whether the funds were used strictly for community interests or also for internal political purposes.

As a result, the total funding received by UDMR, SMCT, and Communitas between 1994 and 2025, from the Romanian government, as direct allocations to organizations representing the Hungarian minority, amounts to the following:

- 1994-2005: 191,075,030,000 old lei, equivalent to **93,152,863** current lei;
- 2006-2008: **33,040,000 lei**;
- 2009-2025: **536,042,820 lei**;

Reaching a TOTAL of 662,235,683 lei (approximately 133.24 million euros).

This is a figure that could shock the Romanian taxpayers, especially given that many Romanian communities in isolated villages, in the diaspora, or even in Transylvania in Romanian communes in Covasna and Harghita do not receive anywhere near comparable financial support. To understand the magnitude of this amount: 120 million euros is enough to build the Leghin-Moțca section of the A8 motorway (Andrei, 2025) and even less is needed to build a new pediatric hospital (Apipie, 2022).

6. Impact and Conclusions

In areas where localities are politically dominated by UDMR (the counties of Covasna-Harghita) and even counties where they do not necessarily have a Hungarian majority (parts of Bihor, Mureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj counties), we are faced with a dilution of the Romanian's state presence and authority. The institutional networks controlled by UDMR, schools, local media, cultural NGOs, and local public administrations often operate in a closed circuit, promoting a distinct identity and their own agenda, aligned with Budapest's policy. This creates "*invisible internal borders*" that separate ethnic communities. The Romanian majority in these areas feels abandoned and discriminated against, complaining that the local authorities controlled by UDMR neglect the interests of Romanian citizens (Baltasiu, Săpunaru and Bulumac, 2013). For their part, Hungarians in the same areas are increasingly less likely to look to Bucharest as the center of power, believing that their problems

can be solved either locally through UDMR or directly through the support of Budapest. This split in national solidarity is perhaps the most dangerous effect of the policy of small steps: without formally breaking down borders, it manages to “move” the symbolic frontier, delimiting a “country within a country” (Bădescu, Dungaciu and Baltasiu, 1995).

The Romanian case illustrates a distinctive example of what Bíró and Pallai (2010) describe as a *political accommodationist paradigm*. Romania has established a stable system of general-purpose subsidies for national minority organizations, granting them consistent public funding and broad discretion over its use. Among European states, it remains one of the few to provide such sustained institutional and financial support to a national minority organization that simultaneously operates as a political actor. This paradox, where the state continuously finances, through public funds, an ethnopolitical structure that advances collective autonomy within a unitary constitutional framework highlights the contradictions inherent in Romania’s approach to minority governance. Resources intended for cultural preservation have become, in practice, the structural basis for a parallel system of political and institutional representation.

Despite Romania’s declared commitment to supporting historical communities, the actual budgetary practice reveals a striking imbalance. As we observed in this analysis, for decades, the Romanian state has allocated hundreds of millions of lei to sustain the autonomy-building structures of the Hungarian community in Transylvania, while the historical Romanian communities beyond the country’s borders have received only modest support through the Department for Romanians Abroad (DRP) for many years, having a budget between 3 and 5 million lei per year for projects abroad (DRP official data, 2021-2023), these values increasing only in recent years such as 2024 and 2025. In the past, these sums were less than the funding allocated in a single year to organizations affiliated with UDMR inside Romania, which exceeded 64 million lei in 2025 alone. Such a discrepancy highlights a profound inequity: while Romania finances, from its own public budget, an internal autonomy project, it underfunds the preservation of Romanian identity across its historical borders.

In comparison with other historical minorities in Europe, the asymmetry is striking. The South Tyroleans in Italy (Peterlini, 2013), or the Catalans in Spain (Maite, 2018) operate within transparent and constitutionally regulated frameworks of autonomy, with clearly defined limits of competence and control. None of these cases involves a minority that receives unconditional public funding to maintain institutions that function as parallel administrations. Romania thus appears as a unique anomaly in which state resources are transformed into instruments for building a separate political identity.

Based on the data analyzed here, there is place to argue about the existence of an unofficial *de facto* autonomy: UDMR has created a framework in which important decisions for the Hungarian community in education, culture, and local economic development are taken either at the level of local/county councils dominated by UDMR, or in Budapest, in consultation with UDMR, and only then communicated to Bucharest.

In conclusion, this reality requires an intelligent, firm but nuanced response from the authorities in Bucharest in order to reaffirm constitutional principles without fueling inter-ethnic conflicts. The stake is to maintain Romania as a unitary and sovereign state in practice, not just in name, which is a stake that concerns both the Romanian majority and the ethnic Hungarian citizens, whose prosperity and rights can only be fully guaranteed in a state that does not cede its fundamental attributes.

Despite the fact that UDMR, with leaders in Harghita and Covasna counties, has benefited for over three decades from a constant flow of financial resources from both the Romanian and Hungarian governments, the social and economic reality of these counties remains one marked by profound disparities with the rest of the country. In 2023, the GDP per capita in Harghita was approximately €12,230, below the national average (CNP, 2024), and in Covasna the situation was similar, with values consistently below the regional average of €12,297 (Ecoteca, 2025) compared to the national average of €13,916. This discrepancy is directly reflected in the standard of living: in November 2024, the average net salary in Harghita was 3,995 lei, the lowest in the country (Informatia Harghitei, 2024), while in Covasna it was around 4,125 lei, also below the national average of 4,479 lei (Luca, 2024).

On a social level, the indicators confirm the same reality of marginalization. The unemployment rate in Covasna reached 5.09% in December 2023, significantly higher than the national average (Ziar Harghita, 2025), and in Harghita, access to jobs remains limited, with long-term unemployment in rural areas (Ziar Harghita, 2021). Nationally, the risk of poverty or social exclusion was 27.9% in 2024 (INS 2025) but sociological analyses indicate an even higher level of vulnerability in Harghita and Covasna (Lupu, 2018). This paradoxical picture shows that, although millions of euros have been directed in recent decades to projects politically managed by UDMR and additionally supported by Hungarian funds, the local population has not benefited from real development, but has remained trapped in a cycle of underdevelopment, poverty, and dependence.

Furthermore, an analysis of budget allocations to UDMR and the foundations it controls reveals a financial mechanism of remarkable scale and surprising continuity, regardless of the political context or demographic dynamics of the Hungarian community. From modest sums received as a political party in the 2000s, UDMR has come to directly manage over 20 million lei annually as an NGO within a decade, and in recent years to exceed 60 million lei annually. Cumulatively, between 1994 and 2025, Hungarian organizations have benefited from over 600 million lei in public funds allocated directly by the Romanian government. This development raises legitimate questions about the sustainability, proportionality, and, above all, transparency of these allocations, given that public justifications are sketchy, access to information is blocked, and real control over the destination of the funds is practically non-existent. In a democratic state, the management of such large public funds should be accompanied by clear reporting and auditing obligations, not just formal entrustment to a political entity with an ambiguous status between party, NGO, and cultural intermediary.

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