METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS IN STUDYING THE EFFECT OF (INTER)ETHNICITY ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR, WITH EXAMPLES FROM BULGARIA, ROMANIA, AND SLOVAKIA

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Summary: This article is based on an empirical multi-country analysis and on a systemic theoretical research on how the (inter)ethnic factor influences voting behaviour. The multi-ethnic regions from Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia included in this study differ significantly across a spectrum of political, social, and economic characteristics. However, they are similar with respect to one particular aspect – the historic cohabitation of two or more distinct cultures. Examining the diverse backgrounds and traditions of political science and sociology, this paper attempts to show how ethnicity and, implicitly, interethnicity, both objectively and subjectively constructed, influence political behaviour in the given regions. Despite the obvious complexity of determination systems specific to multi-ethnic communities, so far little research has focused on the impact of ethnicity and interethnicity on political behaviours in general and on voting behaviour in particular. Electoral studies continue to focus on traditional "ethnic solidarities", a thesis that is often contradicted by empirical findings and, as a matter of fact, by the present research. The article concludes by reflecting critically on the current mechanical models of analysis, which are based on a simplistic understanding of ethnicity and ethnic minorities' identities. At the same time, it questions the methodological limitations in explaining the atypical cases of non-ethnic voting.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel beruht auf einer empirischen Analyse mehrerer Länder sowie auf einer systemisch-theoretischen Forschungsarbeit darüber, wie (inter)ethnische Einflüsse das Wahlverhalten beeinflussen. Die multi-ethnischen Regionen Bulgarien, Rumänien und Slowakei, die diese Studie umfasst, unterscheiden sich signifikant hinsichtlich breit gefächerter politischer, sozialer und wirtschaftlicher Charakteristika, aber sie gleichen sich dennoch bezüglich eines bestimmten Aspekts – des historisch bedingten Zusammenlebens zweier oder mehr unterschiedlicher Kulturen. Bei der Untersuchung der verschiedenen politikwissenschaftlichen und soziologischen Hintergründe und Traditionen haben wir versucht zu beobachten wie Ethnizität und auf implizierte Weise, Interethnizität, sowohl objektiv als auch subjektiv konstruiert, das politische Verhalten in den gegebenen Regionen beeinflussen. Trotz der eindeutigen Komplexität der Bestimmungssysteme, die bezeichnend sind für Gemeinschaften, die sich aus mehreren Kulturen zusammensetzen, sind bisher nur wenige Forschungsprojekte dem Einfluss von Ethnizität und Interethnizität auf politisches Verhalten im Allgemeinen und Wahlverhalten im Speziellen, gewidmet. Die Wahlstudien konzentrieren sich weiterhin auf tradierte „ethnische Solidaritäten", eine These, die oft durch empirische Studien widerlegt wird, und im Übrigen auch von unserer Studie. Der Artikel endet mit einer kritischen Reflexion über derzeitige methodologische Analysenmodelle, die auf einem vereinfachten Verständnis von Ethnizität und Identitäten ethnischer Minderheiten beruhen, sowie der Frage der methodologischen Begrenztheit bei der Erklärung atypischer Fälle des trans-ethnischen Wählens.

Keywords: Minorities, multi-ethnic regions, (inter)ethnicity, voting behaviour, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia

1 Introduction

A unidisciplinary study on the effect of ethnicity and interethnicity on political behaviours could hardly establish what the weight of historical and cultural contexts is. History might open the research field, indicating the directions that are worthy of investigation, and it might contribute significantly to the understanding of the general picture of the investigated phenomena (the heritage left by the past in terms of social representations, mentalities, or cultural values; the collective memories involved in the formation of political preferences, behaviours, and attitudes, etc.): "The souvenir is stronger than the reality of the present […]. The memory, even at the time of migrations and of mass culture, founded those political climates […] orienting the individual's vote" (YSMAL 1990, 59). Political geography and human geography might ascertain important regional delimitations for the analysis of the major pattern differences; their main contributions to the electoral field were actually already encapsulated in the

ecological approach that was launched by Siegfried, with his well-known study from 1913, *i.e. Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République* (MAYER and PERRINEAU 1992, 39–55). Sociology and political science can foreground the role that specific social, economic, and political factors play in structuring political behaviours; and these factors will be examined further on. But none of these perspectives can explain the mechanisms of ethno-cultural interactions, the way they influence (regional) identities, solidarities and, afterwards, social and political opinions and behaviours. For answering such a question, the theoretical and methodological instruments offered by political psychology and social psychology are to be taken into consideration as well. I refer especially to those clarifying the psychological processes behind the formation of ethnic stereotypes and the intercultural relations – two categories of determiners which are particular to multi-ethnic regions (DRAGOMAN and ZAMFIRA 2008).

Despite the extremely complex and interesting reasons for ethnic and non-ethnic votes, no systematic research has been carried out so far in this field. Only weak connections exist between the works dealing with voting behaviour in multi-ethnic regions. Therefore, defining and assessing the effect of (inter)ethnic context on the formation of political/ electoral preferences and attachments remains an unfulfilled goal. The main two causes of this state of affairs are probably the almost complete absence of an inter-paradigmatic dialogue, on the basis of which one may set up an integrated methodological framework, and the missing statistical data needed to calculate the size of the (non-)ethnic votes.

Aiming to contribute to the advancement of this research field, this paper sets out to broadly state and interrogate the methodological limitations in studying the effect of (inter)ethnicity on voting behaviour at the local level (where interethnicity is supposed to have a stronger impact upon traditional allegiances). At the same time, this paper also seeks to envisage possible forthcoming solutions for overcoming these limitations. The main research question to be answered here (What are the methodological limitations in studying the effect of (inter)ethnicity on voting behaviour?) is supported by two complementary sub-questions: What can and cannot be known about (non-)ethnic voting by means of theoretical and methodological findings from previous related works? In order to answer these clustered questions, the article is written in the form of a discussion of three empirical cases: Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. The minorities

included in this study – Turks in Bulgaria (Fig. 1), Germans (Fig. 2) and Hungarians in Romania (Fig. 3), and Hungarians in Slovakia (Fig. 4) – are politically the most visible. These three countries have been selected according to two main criteria. The first is the similarity of their ethnic geographies, ethnic past, and former political regimes. Second, the ethno-linguistic factor should play an important everyday role in the political life of each country. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia do share a long history of interethnic relations and did experience similar political regimes throughout history until the present day. Though the central scope of this paper is rather methodological, the comparability of cases represents an important prerequisite for broadly approaching the aforesaid limitations and, also, for formulating some generalizable conclusions about (non-)ethnic voting and its study.

The main objective situates this research on the common ground that sociology and political science share: i.e. political sociology, or, to be more precise, within a particular branch of this field – electoral geography. Due to the above-mentioned methodological limitations and to implicit theoretical voids, the present study does not stand for an interdisciplinary approach, but for a multidisciplinary one. Several series of factors of great importance in the aforecited disciplines (and their effects) are discussed in order to prove their relevance or, perhaps, their irrelevance within the process of political behaviour formation in the three post-communist countries. For this purpose, descriptive statistics are prefered; the employment of inferential methods and comparative analysis would not be appropriate in the absence of symmetric demographic and electoral data.

2 Theoretical framework and methodological discussion

Though focused on the methodological limitations in studying the effect of (inter)ethnicity on voting, and not on a particular theoretical issue, this article uses available demographic and electoral data in the same way as one that would eventually attempt to diagnose the electoral behaviour in ethnically mixed regions. The three selected empirical cases are supposed to demonstrate the methodological limitations in studying this topic clearer than an abstract argumentative text. Thus, up to a certain point, this article is designed similarly to a theoretically grounded, multi-case analysis. Its limits
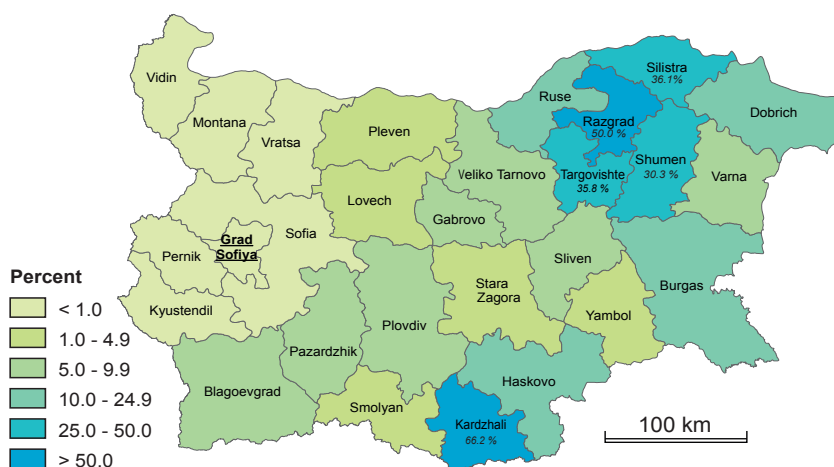
Fig. 1: Bulgarian residents identifying as Turkish as a percentage of county populations
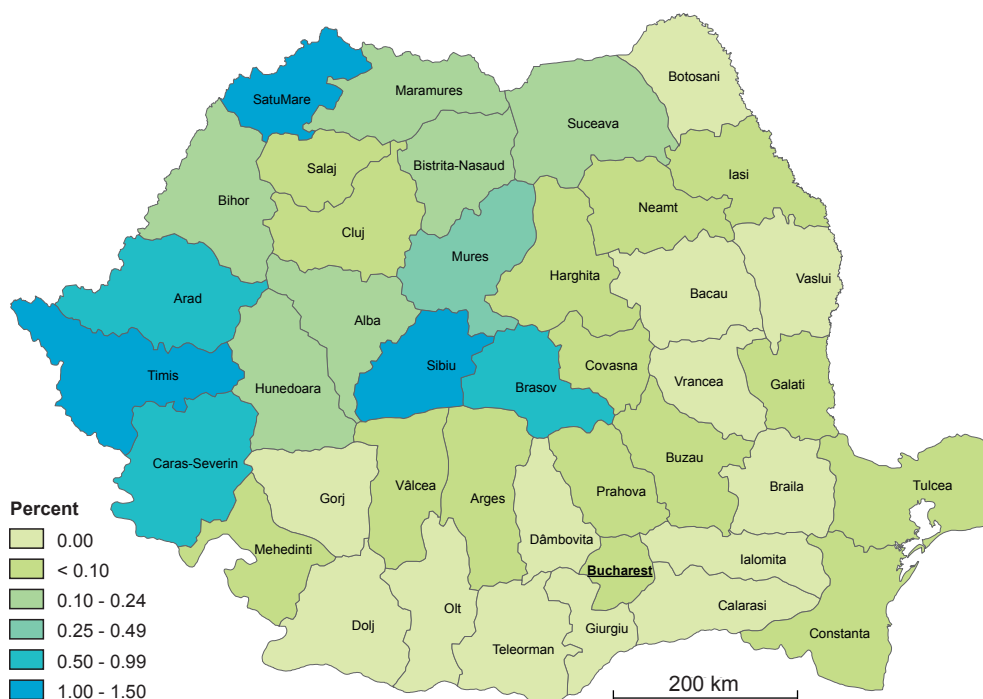
Fig. 2: Romanian residents identifying as German as a percentage of county populations

are symptomatic of the difficulties that researchers encounter in this specific area. These things having been said, this paper continues by developing the conceptual and theoretical framework.

When discussing ethnicity and politics in post-communist countries, many scholars invariably introduce concepts like (national) minorities, ethnic (minority) parties, etc. Such discursive notions, with clear correspondences in the legal documents, constitute evidence of the way in which the states in question approach ethnic diversity.

How can one define the concept of (national) minority? Extracting the core elements of the definition from the academic literature, one can define national minorities as non-dominant groups with a common language, a common culture, a common social memory (PLASSERAUD 1998, 42–51) – a group that is found in a historical relation with an external kin-state, aware of its distinctiveness, that publicly claims to be recognized as a distinct nation(ality) with specific cultural and political rights (BRUBAKER 1996). National minorities differ depending on

their genesis – voluntary migration versus frontiers changing (PLASSERAUD 1998) – and, also, depending on a series of characteristics related to intra- and interethnicity. With respect to ethnic solidarities, for instance, which are largely determined by both types of interaction, they tend to be traditional, mechanical, even reactive, when interethnic relations are tense and there is a strong feeling of ethnic belongingness; in the opposite case, ethnic solidarities are competitive and concur to create a climate dominated by tolerance and reciprocity. These different situations are mainly explained by the theories of modernisation (GRAUBARD 1964; LIJPHART 1977a; HANNAN 1979). The interrelations within a given multi-cultural community are largely responsible for ethnocentric attitudes. Ethnocentrism, the tendency to consider that the in-group is "better" than the out-group, stands for a general prerequisite in the psychological research devoted to interculturality (SUMMER 1907 apud GAVRELIUC 2011). The levels of ethnocentrism depend, as one could easily suspect, on the way the in-group and the out-group interact but also on national politics (and policies) affecting the local and regional groups. All this discussion about intra- and interethnicity is meant to emphasize their inner interdependencies and their dynamic character, as well. Traditional loyalties or allegiances, ethnic solidarities, ethnocentric views, and attitudes are likely to change under certain conditions and, subsequently, to enable new individual and collective identifications, new forms of political participation, and new patterns of voting behaviour.

In a recent article explaining ethnic mobilisation in post-communist countries, GHERGHINA and JIGLĂU, relying mainly on a political science approach, advanced several hypotheses that might be enlightening for the phenomenon of ethnic voting, as well. The territorial concentration of the ethnic minority, past conflict relations between the dominant group and the ethnic minority, the success of anti-minority parties, the legislative support of the kin-state, and formal and informal discrimination are some of the most important hypothetical conditions for ethnic (political) mobilization (GHERGHINA and JIGLĂU 2011). Discrimination, for instance, constitutes one of the most relevant factors for both ethnic and nationalist voting (BIRNIR 2007). Ethnic mobilization, as well as ethnic voting, largely expresses the feeling of collective insecurity. Widely generalizing, one can argue that the more culturally or politically insecure minorities feel, the more they become nationalist. Therefore, in order to figure out the logic or the motivations behind ethnic (political) mobilization and

voting, one should first understand how this feeling of collective insecurity emerges and evolves, and what are those factors undermining interethnic relations and, implicitly, the overall situation.

Notwithstanding the important advances in understanding the dynamics behind transcultural identities in general, competitive ethnic solidarities, and non-ethnic voting, electoral studies continue to focus on traditional ethnic solidarities, identities, and behaviours. The reason is easy to account for. In electoral sociology, four main theoretical approaches are typically used to explain voters' motivations but all four are crystalized through research done in culturally homogeneous regions: the ecological perspective (founded by André Siegfried) – insisting on the influence of morphological characteristics (of the territorial units); the sociological approach (proposed by the Columbia School) – focusing on socio-demographic factors; the psychological thesis (advanced by the Michigan School) – of partisan attachment/identification; and the one of economic inspiration (Rational Choice).

For addressing the case of multi-ethnic communities, several particular factors are to be taken into consideration. These factors are generally used in the analysis of (inter)ethnicity and of its political consequences (ZAMFIRA 2012, 207–227). Among the historical factors that play a key role in structuring political attitudes in multi-ethnic communities are: ethnic identity formation (PLASSERAUD 1998), the evolution of interethnic relations (BIRNIR 2007), and of the relations between the "kin-state" and the "host-state" (BRUBAKER 1996; ROGER 2002). The compatibility or the affinity between the co-existing cultures (EASTON 1965; CONNOR 1967; BARTH 1984) and ethnic stereotypes (DRAGOMAN and ZAMFIRA 2008) are to be mentioned among the most relevenat cultural factors. The psychological factors and those related to identity include the type of solidarities (HECHTER 1975; HANNAN 1979) and the type of identifications in relation to the in-group and the out-group (GAVRELIUC 2011). The category of socio-demographic and economic factors encompasses the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of the population (RAE and TAYLOR 1970), the size of the minority group (LIJPHART 1977b), and the configuration of structural cleavages (LIJPHART 1977b; BIRNIR 2007). The administrative and political organisation of the territory (LIJPHART 1977b), the electoral issue and level of electoral constituency, the electoral offer (ZAMFIRA 2011), and the success of anti-minority parties (GHERGHINA and JIGLĂU 2011) are part of the category of political-institutional and electoral factors.

Fig. 3: Romanian residents identifying as Hungarian as a percentage of county populations
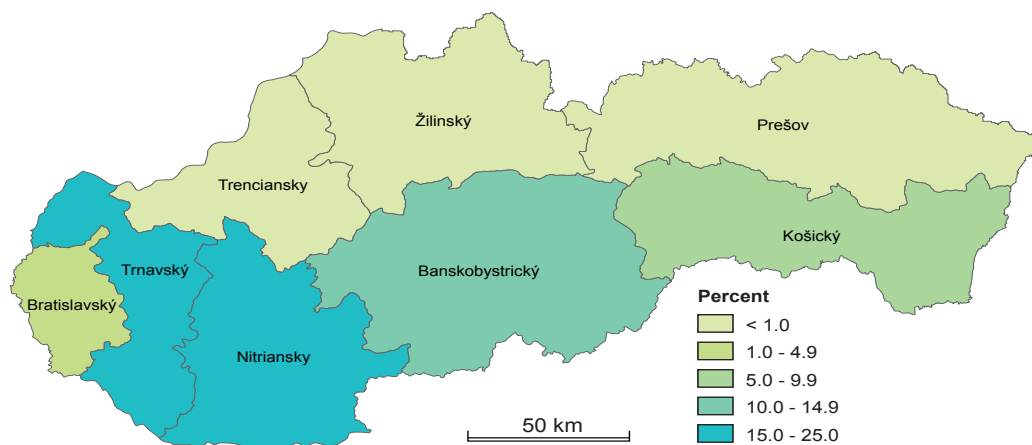

Fig. 4: Slovakian residents identifying as Hungarians as a percentage of county populations

Finally, the electoral campaign and the recent local/ regional interethnic events (Mayer and Perrineau 1992) are to be included among the conjectural (contextual) factors.

This comprehensive (and, certainly, still open) list of factors characterising multi-ethnic regions highlights an essential element for the study of (inter)ethnicity and its effect on voting behaviour, namely the complexity of such a multidisciplinary endeavour. Unfortunately for researchers of politi-

cal behaviour in multi-ethnic regions, it is obvious that the communication between the scientific literature on minorities and (inter)ethnicity, on the one hand, and the one on voting and elections, on the other, is still strongly deficient. The explanations are quite simple. First, few authors (Lijphart 1979; Stroschein 2001; Birnir 2007; Capelle-Pogăcean and Ragaru 2008) so far have been interested in explaining the relation between (inter)ethnicity and voting behaviour. Second, their research is projected

as case studies or comparisons of a small number of cases and, therefore, does not advance generalizable theoretical conclusions. The theoretical approaches of voting behaviour are not yet consistently applied outside the ethno-culturally homogeneous regions. Therefore, it is not possible to draw forth necessary information about the standard and the deviant effects of (inter)ethnicity. The habitual expectancies are all based on a static/mechanical conception of ethnicity or, in other words, on an essentialist ethnicizing conception. For these reasons, it seems that defining ethnicity in direct relation to interethnicity represents a first important step towards a dynamic theoretical approach in this specific field of study.

In order to research voting behaviour in multi-ethnic regions and, hence, to measure the effect of (inter)ethnicity on political preferences, choices, and alignments, this paper aims to explore the multiple research possibilities exposed in the paragraphs above and, at the same time, to discuss the limitations caused by quantitative data availability. Thus, for an ("ecological") analysis of the territorial distribution of the minorities' and majorities' votes in a certain country or region, two categories of data are absolutely necessary: data on the ethno-linguistic structure of the electorate and data on the morphological characteristics of the territory. Unfortunately, data on the ethno-cultural structure of the electorate is collected in very few countries and, if it happens, it happens only now and then and not for every level of electoral constituency and not for every election year. Exit polls that take into account the ethnic dimension of voting are really rare. Sociological and psychological analyses of voting behaviours in multi-ethnic regions would also need data on the ethnic composition of the electorate. What should we do when these data are absent? There are several possible answers. First, exit polls could be carried out upon request or conducted by the very team of researchers interested in the respective issue; but, of course, the adjacent costs are not negligible. Second, the ethnic variable could be deduced – but only in particular cases – from questions that are related, for example, to the mother tongue, the first language spoken at home, etc. Third, when none of these situations is possible, we can use the size of the local/regional minority instead of one of the local/regional "ethnic" electorate – a partial solution on which the present study is based. Nevertheless, this solution is not completely effective and, as a matter of fact, can be used only if "ethnic voting" or "non-ethnic voting" is evident. For example, if participation turnout among the members of the minority is similar to that of the majority and if one of the candidates (leader or party) wins in spite of having a tiny traditional electorate, then it is clear that we are observing a non-ethnic vote. Fourth, interviews and focus groups could replace – to a certain extent – the polls or, in a happy case, they can add valuable qualitative information to the research, thereby enriching the psycho-sociological approach. Qualitative comparative research is maybe one of the most appropriate methods for explaining the similarities and dissimilarities between countries or between culturally heterogeneous regions/ communities.

The aim of the following paragraphs is to start from available quantitative data for deducing massive non-ethnic voting, and, afterwards, to focus on the obvious atypical cases. The interpretation will follow the line of every discipline that was mentioned in the introduction that might be useful to understand the topic of this paper. The intersection of quantitative and qualitative data will be privileged whenever it is possible. As a matter of fact, there is a certain number of factors for the investigation of which the qualitative approach is more suitable (the evolution of interethnic relations, the relations between the kin- and the host-state, ethnic stereotypes, etc.).

3 Factors analysis

The major objective of this article is to identify and discuss the methodological limitations in studying the effect of (inter)ethnicity on voting behaviour at the local level. In so doing, the case examples and their number could have been totally different from the ones chosen for the present research. The factors analysis for the three case examples included in this research serves as a pretext for the discussion of the above-mentioned limitations. This is the reason why the paper did not insist on the analysis of symmetric statistical data (anyway, inaccessible, most of the time); neither did it develop the comparative angle of the research. The information extracted from the three case examples does not enable us to draw generic conclusions about the patterns of voting in the multi-ethnic regions, but only to illustrate the methodological limitations of such a scientific endeavour.

The discussion is mainly based on the electoral data contained in the two following paragraphs, data about some of the cases that definitely contradict the sociological traditional theory. The first one is the massive Romanian electoral support for the Germans' party in Romania (DFGR – Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania/DFDR – Demokratisches

Forum der Deutschen in Rumänien), at the last four local elections (2004–2012). This support could be considered symptomatic of a positive local/regional interethnic experience. The same is valid for the success that Hungarians' most important parties in Romania (DUHR – Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania/RMDSZ – Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség) and Slovakia (PHC – Party of the Hungarian Coalition/MKP – Magyar Koalíció Pártja) achieved in certain localities where the Hungarian population (and, hence, their traditional electorate) is under 50%: Jimbolia and Reghin (Romania), in 2004 and 2008; Nové Zámky (Slovakia), in 1998. Besides the positive interethnic experience, a second important aspect to be taken into account when explaining non-ethnic voting is collective memory (which largely depends on everyday interrelations).

From all these atypical cases, the DFGR is the most noteworthy. Its ex-leader, Klaus Werner Johannis – the current president of Romania since December 2014 (a subject that definitely deserves to be treated separately) – was elected four times (2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012) to the seat of mayor of Sibiu (where Germans' percentage is around 1.6%). The DFGR usually obtains an overwhelming majority of votes in the towns where the German population is estimated at less than 3%. The non-ethnic support that DUHR received at the last local elections is not negligible: more than 20% of Hungarian mayors in Romania are consistently elected in towns and villages with Romanian majoritarian population. In Slovakia, the evident cases of non-ethnic voting are very few and, the same as in Romania, this situation is due to both the majority and the minority: while in Nové Zámky, the capital of Nitra region, Slovaks (69.7% of the local population – SUSR 2013) elected a Hungarian mayor, Štúrovo represents the opposite example, of a locality with Hungarian majority population (68.7% – SUSR 2013) and a Slovak mayor. In Bulgaria, where ethnic parties are constitutionally forbidden, MRF, the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS – Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi), was created as a party defending the minorities' particular interests. In practice, MRF functions as an ethnic party. It is principally sustained by the Turkish-speaking population and, secondly, by Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians). One half of the Pomak population and a third of the Muslim Roma population are estimated to consistently vote for this party. An important number of MRF members and leaders are Bulgarians, not Turks. So, although there are no accessible data about the ethnic structure of the MRF electorate, a part of it is presumably of Bulgarian ethnic origin.

The situations of non-ethnic voting discussed above are among the most known in the three countries. Unfortunately, because of the absence of systematic exit polls data on the minorities' and majorities' electoral choices, we cannot count the exact number of ethnic and non-ethnic votes in the three countries. At the same time, we cannot identify all of the so-called atypical cases that could help us understand the variety of effects that the process of ethnic identity formation and the historical evolution of the relationship between minorities and majorities might have on regional solidarities, political attachments and, implicitly, on voting behaviour.

3.1 Ethnic identity formation and the historical evolution of the relationship between minorities and majorities

The national minorities included in the present study are all formed through contingency (the Turks from Bulgaria, the Hungarians from Romania, and Slovakia) with one single exception: the Germans from Transylvania. The *Rumäniendeutsche* resulted from German migration to the Eastern European territories, which began in the 11th century (HIGOUNET 1989, 95.) Historians characterized this migratory movement as a complex process, inspired not by a nationalist vision, but by objectives of economic, social, and religious (the transmission of Christian religion to the pagan Slavs) natures. The German-Romanian communities from Transylvania-Banat astound, among other aspects, through their propensity for common myths and reciprocity: "[…] between the sixteenth and the late seventeenth century, the Saxon intellectual elites have created a new collective genealogy which made them the descendants of the Goths and of the Geto-Dacians. With this new genealogy occulting the migratory past, the Saxons legitimized their presence in the Transylvanian region. The creation of a local mythical origin was then intended to make from the *Sachsen* 'real' Transylvanians [...]" (MICHALON 2002). The Romanian perspective on the Germans invests the latter with a major role in the construction of medieval cities and, later on, of the modern Romanian State.

In Bulgaria, from the 13th century until the decline of the Ottoman Empire (1878), the Turkish community enjoyed privileged social positions. Hungarians from Romania and Slovakia, as well as the Germans of Transylvania, had similar special statutes during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (until 1918). The new national states that emerged from

the dissolution of these two empires introduced important new regimes of rights but, at the same time, they destroyed all the old privileges. These changes affected primarily ethno-cultural minorities. Not only did they lose their privileges but they were also severely injured by the politics of cultural homogenization.

In Bulgaria, between 1878 and 1908, several measures had as a principal objective to limit the access of the Turkish population to education in their mother tongue. In the '20's, in order to prevent the spread of Turkish nationalism (inspired by Kemal Atatürk), the Bulgarian government enforced repressive measures against the Turkish minority. During communism, Bulgaria experienced several similar episodes. In spite of an apparent political correctness with regard to Turks (asserted by the Constitution of 1947), Bulgaria initiated the nationalisation of Turks' schools, the confiscation of private property, the forced Slavisation of Muslim names, etc. (ŞIMŞIR 1988). In Slovakia, during the communist regime, the use of the Hungarian language in public institutions was prohibited, Hungarian schools were closed, and minorities' property was confiscated. In Romania, during the process of nation-building, Hungarians and Germans were massively discriminated against (VERDERY 1991). The interwar period marked an important transition from Austro-Hungarian rule to Romanian administrative supervision of the territory, to the granting of new political rights for the German population but, also, to new forms of "minorization" and oppression (CIOBANU 2001). The year 1939, the Second World War, and the communist regime changed the situation and the destiny of the German minority dramatically and irreversibly but, at the same time, that of all the other minoritarian ethnic groups living in Romania as well (GIURESCU 2003; WAGNER 2000).

The year 1989, with the fall of the communist regimes and the restoration of the democratic order violently interrupted after the interwar period, triggered a continual movement of minorities to their "motherlands", "external homelands," or "kin-states" (BRUBAKER 1996). Actually, ethnicity is not the only factor of departure. In the case of German migrants, for instance, family cohesion and personal well-being are equally important considerations (MICHALON 2002). The year 1989 also marked the beginning of ethnic mobilisation in South-East Europe; all the four minorities mentioned above are among the first ethnic groups that created their own political organizations in the early years following communism.

The process of ethnic identity formation and the major events in the history of culturally heterogeneous communities can be considered the starting point of the present research. Although they took place long before the period that the present paper is concerned with, these events are crucial for understanding interethnic relations and, thereby, the structure of political behaviours and opinions. In the academic literature, the relations between majorities and minorities formed through deliberate migration are expected to be peaceful and rather cooperative (which, as a matter of fact, is the case of German-Romanian communities). By contrast with minorities resulting from migration, (national) minorities formed through contingency are associated with steadfast hostile attitudes towards the dominant ethnic group (PLASSERAUD 1998). These two assumptions seem to largely correspond to the interethnic realities in South-East Europe. The first context described above, favourable to transcultural identifications, is definitely generated by a positive interethnic experience and, also, by a non-contradictory collective memory. The second context is more likely to determine separate points of view and negative attitudes towards the Other. Therefore, even if they were subject to similar acts of violence in the past, the national minorities' attitudes towards the dominant groups strongly differ depending on the first interethnic experience on the given territory. And the explanation of this fact is to be found in a more in-depth analysis of the construction of collective memory. The relations between the host-state and the kin-state (tense in the case of Romania and Hungary, and Slovakia and Hungary) and the acts of oppression implemented by the host-state are differently perceived in the two types of interethnic context. In difficult situations, the largely pre-existing feeling of insecurity among the members of minorities formed through contingency is very likely to augment and to set off negative identification within the multi-ethnic community of origin (identification through exclusion). In such a case, the vote is mainly ethnic, nationalist. On the contrary, non-ethnic voting could indicate the presence of certain elements that are predominantly met in the first context described above.

3.2 Interethnic relations, ethnic stereotypes, and solidarities

The history of German-Romanian communities from Transylvania-Banat is, to a certain extent, a chronicle of ethnic conflicts but, at the same time, a

chronicle of important efforts of cultural accommodation. Today, the German-Romanian communities still bear the irrefutable mark of the major injurious events from the last two centuries: the civil war of 1848; the nationalist policies of the young Romanian State created in 1918; the communist measures against minorities, *i.e.* deportations, dispossessions (LIVEZEANU 1995; HITCHINS 1999), and perpetrating the ferocity of the two World Wars against the "Other", whoever this may have been. Despite the Germans' last two main waves of emigration from Romania (that took place at the end of the Second World War and during the first years following the Revolution of 1989) and the resulting implicit demographic homogenization, the old German-Romanian communities from Transylvania-Banat continued to preserve their multi-ethnic character.

The German-Romanian communities are distinguished from the majority of similar communities in Romania, and also in Europe, by the formation process (the voluntary migration of Germanic people), the voluntary acculturation (demonstrated by the linguistic loans within the mixed work group over time), the positive mutual stereotypes, the attachment to and the identification with the multi-ethnic community of origin, the propensity for common founding myths, etc. Researchers in the field show that interethnicity survives in collective memory and continues to influence the subjective identities and everyday life within these communities. They also demonstrate that ethnicity and interethnicity are still relevant phenomena in local narratives despite the absence of interethnic contact (GOLOMOZ 2013; PAP 2013). Moreover, in Transylvania-Banat, unlike the situation of the Hungarian-Romanian communities, relations between Romanians and Germans are usually characterized as open and socially constructive, The solidarities specific to the Romanian-German communities are generally considered non-opposable and non-reactive, but competitive.

Along these lines of thought, it should not be surprising that political scientists and sociologists analysing the spectacular success of the German minority party in the county of Sibiu and the neighbouring counties, after 2000 until the present, have revealed that the massive non-ethnic voting is due to the phenomenon of transculturation (DRAGOMAN and ZAMFIRA 2008; ZAMFIRA 2012). The proof of such an extraordinary phenomenon are to be found, for instance, in the creation of common myths (MICHALON 2002) and mutuality-based relationships.

Even if the social distance between Romanians and Germans is smaller than that separating Romanians and Hungarians, differences alone cannot account for the two types of voting tendencies (non-ethnic voting in the Romanian-German regions and ethnic voting in Romanian-Hungarian regions). Generally, Romanians associate positive stereotypes to Germans; the measure of sympathy Germans enjoy is definitely more important than the Hungarians' (DRAGOMAN 2005). Similarly, in Slovakia, the amount of sympathy Hungarians enjoy (apparently not higher than in Romania) is surpassed by the Czechs' (BOISSERIE 2003). In Bulgaria, the interethnic climate was generally peaceful and one of the reasons for this situation is represented by the good relations between Bulgaria and Turkey (ROGER 2002). Nevertheless, it is very important to mention that ethnic stereotypes and solidarities slightly vary from one region to other and one local community to other. They seem to depend, among other factors, on the ethnic fragmentation of the population, the size of the minority group, etc.

3.3 The ethnic fragmentation of the population and the size of the minority group

Today, after a continuous exodus, the German-speaking population in Romania is estimated at 0.17%. By comparison, in 1930, official statistics reported a proportion of 4%. The percentage of Hungarians living in Romania is 6.1%, of Turks in Bulgaria – 8.8%, of Hungarians in Slovakia – 8.46% (NSI 2011; INS 2011; SUSR 2013). The index of ethnic fragmentation (RAE and TAYLOR 1970), calculated on the basis of the data gathered by LECLERC (2010), is about 0.27 for Bulgaria, 0.19 for Romania and 0.25 for Slovakia, values which are situated in the first inferior quarter of the interval. In the multi-ethnic regions from these countries, this index is much higher. In Bulgaria, the Turkish-speaking population is the majority in two regions – Kurdzhali and Razgrad. In Romania, Hungarians are the majority in two counties (Covasna and Harghita) and, in Slovakia, in two Southern districts – Dunaszerdahely (Trnava) and Komarom (Nitra).

The general expectancy is that the number of non-ethnic votes in favour of the minority party is more important when the territorial concentration is low and the dominant group is largely majoritarian. The explanation for this situation is to be found through an analysis of how the feeling of insecurity emerges and evolves within multi-cultural commu-

nities. What about the effect of these factors on ethnic voting in the three ex-communist countries? In Romania, for instance, the relevance of the index of ethnic fragmentation is debatable. As we can already observe, in the past two local elections, Romanians overwhelmingly supported the party of a tiny minority in Sibiu (1.6%) – the DFGR –, but at the same time, they voted almost equally enthusiastically for the main party of the Hungarians (who are much more numerous than the Germans) in Jimbolia (14.75%) and Reghin (28.77%) (EDRC 2002), etc. The situations of Nové Zámky and Stúrovo (Slovakia) are very similar to these. Anyway, the overall impression is that the weight of the two factors here analysed, the ethnic fragmentation of the population and the size of the minority group, is not marginal. On the contrary – there is no evidence of cases of non-ethnic voting in localities with a tight numerical rapport, e.g. 50%–50%. Nevertheless, for a correct measurement of the effect of the ethnic fragmentation of the population and the size of the minority group, both indicators should be calculated at the local and national levels. Psychological pressures might differ considerably from one level of analysis to another.

3.4　The territorial system of political administration and the socio-economic situation

Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Romania inherited a centralized administrative structure from the communist period. Despite several laws and administrative reforms that were introduced after 1990, these countries continue to have numerous difficulties in implementing local and regional politics.

All the 28 administrative territorial units in Bulgaria are endowed with equal prerogatives; each of them is headed by a governor whose institution is responsible for the implementation of national policies at the local level and, at the same time, responsible (but only in principle) for solving minorities' problems. In fact, for the simple reason that the governor's authority is limited by the Law on Local Autonomy and Local Administrations (a law which does not include any provisions regarding ethnolinguistic rights), the major part of minorities' specific interests and problems cannot be pursued at the local/regional level. In spite of the fact that several regionalisation projects were discussed after 1989, Romania kept a unitary system of political administration. The territory is divided into 41 counties (and the capital) without political autonomy. The 8 development regions, created in 1998, did not have

a precise administrative status; the counties are the only territorial units offering to both minorities and majorities the possibility to integrate their specific interests to the political agenda. In Slovakia, two important laws on decentralisation were adopted in 1996 and 2001. The 8 regions created in 1996 were empowered with administrative autonomy in 2001. Consequently, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, important areas of decision and competence were transmitted by the state to the new local communities. A president and an assembly of deputies now represent each region.

In the centralized or partially regionalized countries (Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia), the possibility to solve the problems of minorities other than through parties is practically absent. This is the reason why ethnic issues become so important in electoral campaigns, especially at the legislative level. The presence of ethno-regionalist parties in the local/regional and national political structures is one of the few instruments through which minority groups can express their needs and dissatisfactions. This is the reason why most minority parties prefer to present ethnic offers and to keep their exclusive interest in ethnic issues.

Some of the multi-ethnic regions in the ex-communist countries are among the poorest ones, with a monthly income and an employment rate lower than the national average – the cumulative and presumably intended effect of the politics of inequality largely practiced in centralised administrative systems. It is the case of Silistra and Shumen in Bulgaria (NSI 2001), Covasna and Harghita in Romania (INS 2011), Trnava and Nitra in Slovakia (SUSR 2013). Very often, socio-economic inequalities become the main subject of the negative electoral campaigns, a pretext for exclusivist ethnic offers, and one of the main causes of nationalist voting and of the negative attitudes against the Other. It is interesting to note that in the Western countries where the central institutions have granted important degrees of political autonomy and economic responsibility to the multi-ethnic regions (Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, etc.), the ethnic problems are no longer relevant issues within the electoral campaigns. That being said, the territorial system of political administration and the socio-economic situation could also be considered to stand for relevant indicators in the study of ethnic and non-ethnic voting. Also, the type of scrutiny (local/regional vs. national) seems to have a significant effect on the issues debated during campaigns and, implicitly, on voting. In general, the effect of ethnicity is greater in the national elec-

tions than in the local ones, most probably because of the personalistic character of the local vote and the lower importance that parties and voters accord to ethno-cultural issues at the local level (than at the national one). This is, of course, another explanation for the larger number of non-ethnic votes in the local elections.

4   Conclusions

Although primarily focused on a methodological issue, this article also attempts to raise scholars' awareness of the multiple significance embodied in the ethnic and non-ethnic votes. As well as mixed marriages (marriages between people with different ethno-linguistic membership or, extrapolating, between nationals of different countries), non-ethnic voting could be considered a particularly conclusive indicator of (social) integration and, in addition to mixed marriages, of competitive solidarities, of intercultural relations based on dialogue and cooperation, and, to a certain extent, of transculturality. Transculturality constitutes a major achievement of post-nationalism and post-materialism, often present in the regions of Western Europe that have redefined their genealogical myths in accordance with the postmodern(ist) usages of ethnicity (Alsace, Aosta Valley, South Tyrol, etc.).

Unfortunately, little research has been done so far on (non-)ethnic voting and, in most cases, important conclusions for sociologists and political scientists remained without an echo in socio-psychological and socio-cultural anthropological circles. Intriguing findings on the contemporary (multi)ethnic imaginary could be extracted from the electoral studies carried out in countries like Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia or, at the opposite pole, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain, where intercultural relations are no longer defined in exclusionist terms.

The ethnically heterogeneous communities included in the present study offer a veritably rich and fascinating research field, which could help us better understand the mechanisms of interethnicity, the identity dynamics within multi-cultural societies and the process of transculturation. As emphasized in the text, non-ethnic voting is symptomatic of a non-contradictory collective memory and, implicitly, of a positive interethnic experience. Non-ethnic voting is favoured by a specific type of (inter)ethnic context, characterized by the following elements: the formation of the minority through voluntary migration; voluntary acculturation; positive mutual stereotypes;

attachment to (and the identification with) the multi-ethnic community of origin; the propensity for common founding myths; tolerance towards the Other; social relationships based on reciprocity and cooperation; high social capital, etc. The interesting positive metamorphoses of the *alter*-images – despite the historical episodes of formal and informal discrimination, forced cohabitation, cultural uniformisation, and deportatation in forced-labour camps – demonstrate once more the complexity of the mechanisms of interaction specific to the multi-cultural communities and, at the same time, the high dynamics of interculturality. The recent (positive and negative) interethnic encounters or changes in ethnic self-definition (and group identification) also show it.

Despite all these theoretical insights and empirical findings, mechanical models are still predominant in the analysis of social and political behaviours in multi-ethnic regions. No systematic study of (non-)ethnic voting that has taken into account the series of factors considered in this paper has been done so far. This situation could give the impression that atypical cases – the non-ethnic votes – are mere accidents or exceptions without scientific relevance. Maybe this very perspective, that ethnicity has an inherent static character and, consequently, a determinant effect on human behaviour in general is responsible for the little attention which has been paid to non-ethnic voting. The operationalization of ethnicity in direct relation to interethnicity – its approach as a continual and dynamic process – could constitute a crucial step to be followed from now on. Ethnicity alone does not reveal much about individuals' political choices, for instance, not even in cases of ghettoization. The absence of interethnic contact does not go together with identities exclusively based on in-group mechanisms and this situation occurs on account of two causes. First, ethnic identity construction is triggered exactly by the comparison with an Other; self-images proceed by hetero-images. Second, as a lot of scholars argue, the imagined interethnicity might have comparable effects with the ones of lived interethnicity.

Certainly, the political factor plays a significant role in structuring or, on the contrary, in deconstructing social interaction and solidarities, on mobilizing or demobilizing (inter)ethnic local collectivities, and on promoting or hindering intercultural communication and exchange. Therefore, social and political behaviour in multi-ethnic regions should not be studied independently of the action of institutions, parties, and leaders. Whenever nationalist rhetoric and exclusivist ethnic offers are launched during

electoral campaigns, people vote traditionally, supporting the party(-ies) representing them ethnically. The territorial system of political administration and the socio-economic situation have also important effects on voting behaviour. In the countries where the only instrument that the local groups have for accomplishing their specific objectives is participation within the political structures (which is the case for all the minorities presented in this study), ethnic issues gain a particular discursive importance during electoral campaigns, especially at the legislative level. At the local level, the effect of ethnicity is weaker because of the personalistic character of the vote. When the regions with a high concentration of (national) minority population are among the poorest (which is the case of Silistra and Shumen in Bulgaria, Covasna and Harghita in Romania, Trnava and Nitra in Slovakia), economic and political inequalities become a powerful pretext for ethno-nationalist politicians to formulate exclusive electoral offers and, sometimes, extremist claims. In response, voters definitely choose to give more power to the anti-majority candidates. Besides, these are the explanations for a large number of ethnic votes in the local elections discussed in the article.

The exceptional cases (of non-ethnic voting) – at least the known ones – are very few: the pro-Hungarian votes in Nové Zámky and the pro-Slovak ones in Štúrovo (Slovakia); the pro-Hungarian votes in Jimbolia, Reghin, and some other small Romanian localities; and, certainly the most impressive votes, the pro-German votes in all the Transylvanian localities where the German Forum is electorally present. In Bulgaria, notwithstanding the missing data, departing from the fact that the Turkish party includes also ethnic Bulgarians among its members and leaders, we can presume that a part of the electorate is formed by ethnic Bulgarians. Regarding the ethnic fragmentation of the population and the size of the minority group in localities where people vote nontraditionally, we have to admit that no regularity has been observed. But this situation could be caused by the insufficient data. Indeed, there are no known cases of non-ethnic voting in localities with a tight numerical rapport, e.g. 50%–50%. Nevertheless, we should not rush to conclude that the influence of these two last factors is marginal.

At present, we cannot know much more about the effect of (inter)ethnicity on voting behaviour. The first reason is, as it is pointed out above, the insufficient available demographic and electoral data, i.e. data on the ethno-linguistic structure of the population and of the electorate (per circumscription).

In an important number of European countries (Belgium, Italy, France, Netherlands, etc.) ethnic census is outlawed and this measure was taken for preventing individuals from being unequally treated. The same is valid for the exit polls. Along these lines of thought, methodological limitations are evident. In the absence of data that would allow researchers to calculate the size of the (non-)ethnic votes, inferential statistical methods and comparative analyses are doomed to fail. Solely qualitative research could compensate in a considerable degree for this void and, also, could provide us with more in-depth explanations. This being said, the discussion remains open to further interdisciplinary research devoted to minorities, (inter)ethnicity, and (non-)ethnic voting.

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