

Heroes, conflicts and reconciliations in Romanian-Hungarian sport confrontations

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Abstract: *Romanians and Hungarians have a long history of rivalry in politics, culture and sport. Rarely, history speaks about symbols of reconciliation, probably because these actors are episodic personalities and because the conflicts are longer and they have a cyclic manifestation. The battle for Transylvania was a permanent subject in the Romania-Hungary relation. Also, the high number of Hungarians ethnics in Romania provoked different attitudes in the last centuries. Sport was one of the newest ways to expose the conflict between the Romanians and the Hungarians. From interwar period until nowadays, sport activities which included these two national groups has generated debates, violence and few moments of reconciliation. In fact, I will follow this last aspect, in the context of an image of permanent conflict, to analyse the importance of some symbols of reconciliation.*

Keywords: conflict, reconciliation, ethnic groups, supporters, Romanian sport, Hungarian sport

The idea of nation is still an active concept in the Romanian-Hungarian relation, especially if we see the problem of Székely Land autonomy¹. The history of these countries has been inter-crossing since the Middle Age and the rivalry has been always animated. According to historian László Kontler, these two nations

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¹ Székely Land or Szeklerland is a historic region in Romania, inhabited mainly by the Hungarian people (approximately 60% in 2002). It is located in Eastern part of Transylvania and it is corresponding today to counties Harghita, Covasna and some parts of Mureș. The Hungarian representatives of this region, with a support from some political leaders from Budapest, solicitate to the Romanian state to offer them territorial autonomy. For a basic documentation regarding the subject, I recommend the Master thesis of Edina-Ildikó Őrte, *The Szekler Autonomy Initiatives*, submitted to Central European University, Budapest, 2010.

“have mutually remained *constitutive others* for one another throughout the 1990s” and this idea was strengthened by the intellectual groups of both sides². Also, he accuses the awkward reconciliation realised by the political elites. Therefore, one can argue that the political relations and the nationalist attitude have also influenced the sport area.

The control over the Romanian region of Transylvania was a good reason for politicians, both from national and regional level, from Romania or Hungary, to promote their national speech. Transylvania always has been a contested territory, characterized by Laszlo Kurti as a space “fraught with contradiction and poignant conflicts”, under the pressure of the nationalistic climate, present both in Romania and Hungary. Kurti proclaims the existence of a complex situation with “unresolved tensions, unwarranted accusations, and subjective responses”³.

In order to discuss this problem in the social field, I utilize the concept of violence, which is presented with many nuances in sport confrontations between Romanians and Hungarians. Galtung theorises and classifies the concept of violence: direct violence (people are murdered), structural violence (people die of poverty) and cultural violence⁴. The last one is in my attention because it is related with sport and the idea of conflict in this domain. The cultural violence is expressed in different ways, such as patriotism, heroism, racism, sexism or religion.

The symbolic violence, a dimension of cultural violence, is observable in everyday life and it is determined by the cultural codes of otherness. This dimension of “friends and enemies”, after Carl Schmitt theoretical bi-valence over political space⁵, is also visible in sport, an activity defined by rivalry. The symbolic violence is present in sport and it is a characteristic for matches or encounters with an important stake.

Galtung argues that general attitudes and behaviour are constantly changing. In our case, the conflict between Romanians and Hungarians in public space has a dynamic evolution. The cultural violence is determined by conflict

² László Kontler, “Foreword”, in Balázs Trencsényi, Dragos Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi, and Zoltán Kántor (eds.), *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*, Budapest, Regio Books, 2001, p. 7.

³ Laszlo Kurti, “Transylvania, land beyond reason: toward an anthropological analysis of a contested terrain”, *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 14, 1989, pp. 21–52.

⁴ Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence”, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1990, pp. 291-305.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1976.

attitudes and tension. The escalation and de-escalation of conflict is a transitional process, with many irregularities in Romanian-Hungarian case and this article will explain this idea. Therefore, it is important to underline the role of the determinants for this conflict, the cultural differences, the idea of tolerance and respect, or the polarization of interests in the Romanian-Hungarian case.

Sport was perceived like a “bridge-building activity”⁶, even if it had frequently a nationalistic component. Cooperation and conciliation are possible in sport and the Romania-Hungary case is marked by examples in this vein. Football has offered the best proof of collaboration and conciliation between players with different origins and contributed often to peace building (in Liberia, in Ivory Coast, in ex-Yougoslavia). Galtung uses the theory of the “3R-s” which stands for Resolution, Reconciliation and Reconstruction⁷ in order to prove that violence is followed by certain steps/episodes, and this is the same in our demonstration. It is obvious that sport can be used to promote violence and conflicts, but sport can also be an element used to decrease these tensions or aggressions.

Conflict often gives the opportunity to create stereotypes, rumours and distortions. Perception is a key element in sport, because the performances are an important factor for conciliation. In an ethnic conflict these types of actions are usual. Honour is very important for ethnic groups and the fight for honour is related to the necessity of winning the conflict with the rival. In this context, the perceptions from everyday life are transposed in sport, where the laws of fair-play impose conciliation. This idea gives a variety of images over the Romania-Hungary sport relations, influenced by many variables in this context, such as historical periods, political regimes, geographical areas, sports, teams which can be reduced to individuals. A large view about this subject shows that the conflict transformation evolved with periods of reconciliation.

Sports became more important after 1918 and during the interwar period. It was then that the opportunity to have symbols of reconciliation in sport became

⁶ Oliver Ramsbotham, Hugh Miall, Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: the prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011, p. 352.

⁷ Johan Galtung, “After violence, reconstruction, reconciliation, and resolution: Coping with visible and invisible effects of war and violence”, in Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory & Practice*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2001, pp. 3-23.

clear. The football match in the *Christmas truce*⁸ from 1914 is mythicized by its contemporaries and is known as the “Peace Game”. In the history of sport’s relations between Romania and Hungary, the moments of peace are hard to find, comparing with the moments with conflict.

This nationalist discourse has been launched during the 19th century, along with romantic nationalism. The ideas of Romantic nationalism rose during the 1848 revolutions, having the main scope to promote the idea of unity and national independence. In sport, the fair-play concept was many times absent in these duels, starting with the end of the 19th century. The geopolitical statute of Hungary was seen such as a sign of civilization and created a myth around its athletic capacities. The Romanian frustration appeared in many articles, especially after 1918, when Romania begins to be competitive in sport.

The Romanian ethnic diversity could be a reason of those conflicts. Historically, there are three major ethnic groups which inhabit Transylvania area: Romanians, German Saxons, and Hungarians. Romanians were living in the rural space in majority and the other two ethnic groups, along with the Jewish community, played an important role in the urban life of Transylvania⁹. The main argument for the development of sport in the ethnic groups is due to a sport culture strong rooted in Hungarians, Germans, or Jewish population living in Transylvania.

Sport was some timespan element of unity as it was an element of conflict in an ethnic heterogeneous society. Some of the Stephen Castles’ typologies regarding ethnic diversity can be identified also in the Romanian case. He describes ethnicity using the differential exclusion model, the assimilation model, and the pluralist model¹⁰. Every typology of this kind is applicable at one moment in Romanian history. We will observe these changes in sport, concentrating the analyse over the Romanian-Hungarian relation.

⁸ Malcolm Brown, Shirley Seaton, *Christmas Truce: The Western Front, 1914*, New York, Hippocrene, 1984; Stanley Weintraub, *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce*, New York, Plume, 2001.

⁹ *Istoria României. Transilvania* [History of Romania. Transylvania], Vol. II, Cluj-Napoca, George Barițiu Editions, 1997, p. 875.

¹⁰ Stephen Castles, “How nation-states respond to immigration and ethnic diversity”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1995, pp. 293-308.

Boxing and Football: Conflict and reconciliation between wars

After 1918, year of the Great Unification of Romanian territories, the economic growth allowed the sport to rise and to become an important activity in day-to-day activities for Romanian people. Competitions such as athletics, race horses or car competitions diverted the Romanian population. The urban population found an attraction in sport and, at the same time, grew appreciation for the athletes, which were transformed into sport stars by their performances. It is a period when the quick increase of sport interest lead to the development of sport journalism.

Conflicts in sport can be connected with the economic situation. From an economical point of view, the ethnic groups have a major influence in the Romanian towns. They are involved in industry, commercial activities, and in the financial sector. In commerce, the dominance of ethnic groups is very clear. For example, the statistics from Ministry of Commerce and Industry from 1937 shows the existence of 173,145 enterprises and 51,6% of them were controlled by the ethnic groups. Also, the Jewish community is involved in 32,7% from this commercial sector. The situation is the same in the financial sector. In 1930, there were 7,733 financial institutions and the ethnic groups have 55,8% from total¹¹.

If we analyse in detail the image of sport in Romania, from the bivalence conflict/reconciliation, we have to introduce the Lederach's theory of conflict transformation¹², applicable for the Romanian-Hungarian case. The antagonism between these two parts is expressed by competitive contexts; it is naturally created by humans. An important phenomenon, which influences the Romanian-Hungarians relations is the so-called "irredentist current" promoted by Hungary between wars.

The sport associations are used for political purpose. In many towns this principle attracted the local criticism from Romanian leaders and the authorities monitored these groups. For example, in Alba Iulia, the local Police described difficult situations, where the young Hungarians maintained their chauvinistic and irredentist actions by utilizing cultural, economics, sportive, or religious

¹¹ *Istoria României. Transilvania* [History of Romania. Transylvania], Vol. II, Cluj-Napoca, George Barițiu Editions, 1997, p. 884.

¹² John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington DC, 5Th edition, US Institute of Peace Press, 2002; John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.

associations¹³. This fact stimulated the conflict with the Romanian groups from this region and created an anti-Hungarian attitude on national level.

Football, horse racing, or boxing were very popular sports. The international matches were very important for the public; despite the fact that the boxing athletes were not great sport stars in the field. In these international matches, the Hungarian ethnics who represented Romania were very few and their media propaganda was weak. Many of the Romanian sport stars boxers were from Slavic, Italian, or Jewish ethnic groups.

The Hungarians players were not cheered up in the arena, by the Romanians, even if some of them represented Romania, as part of the national team. In that time, Hungary had also its box stars including : István Énekes, his younger brother Vilmos Énekes, Dezső Frigyes, Imre Harangi, Antal Kocsis, Ferenc Nagy, or Lajos Szigeti. These are important names for the history of boxing. In the matches between Romanians and Hungarians, the conflict situation was delicate. Boxing is a sport that conserves totally the conflict between the two ethnic groups and this aspect is amplified by the violent dimension of the sport.

Another side of this situation can be observed in the case of the national team of football, many times seen as an example of “Fair- Play”. In fact, this concept is embodied by team-sports, considered to have a more values and action for peace building. Football is transcultural, so it involves participants from all ethnic groups in the same team. It works to break down stereotypes and build up trust and mutual respect. It also provides a framework for teaching participants conflict resolution.

For Romanians, football became more interesting in the period between world wars, a time in which both football teams from Transylvania and Romanian capital, Bucharest, were dominating the national competitions. These football clubs had players from ethnic groups as part of their teams. Romanians of Hungarian, German, or Jewish origin were shining in internal competition. They were appreciated by fans, and the media wrote reports about their biographies, hobbies, and transformed many of them into stars.

The first football match played at home was between Romania and Poland, and was organised in 1922 in Bukovina, at Cernăuți, in the Northern part of

¹³ Romanian Archives, Region Deva, Fund: Inspectoratul de poliție al tinutului Mureș – Alba [The Police Department of Mureș-Alba Region], File 1/1939, f. 129.

Romania. At the time, the national team was built from players from ethnic minorities apart from one single player with Romanian origins¹⁴. The rest of the players¹⁵ were from ethnic minorities from Romania. The match was played on Maccabi Stadium, a property of the Jewish community. At that time, a high number of Polish people lived in Bukovina, which determined the political authorities and members of Romanian Football Federation to utilize a local player, Stanislas Micinski, in order to avoid conflicts between Romanian and Polish supporters.

This episode shows that the Romanian ethnic players were not in a dominant position. The nationalist ideology proclaimed the right for the ethnic Romanian players to be essential parts for the national team¹⁶. This current grows between 1921 and 1929, after some disappointing results of Romania. Due to the higher number of Hungarian ethnic players in the national team of Romania, it was launched the idea of “a second team of Hungary”.

In the interwar period, the Hungarian football was to a high level, comparable with the English one¹⁷. Games against Hungarian team were events for the Romanian public and this led to the increase of the conflict. First confrontation was in 1931, in Budapest, when the Hungarian team wins with 4-0, which shows a big difference between two football systems. The Romanian team was composed by Stefan Czinczer, Emeric Vogl (Captain), Gheorghe Albu, Constantin Stanciu, Petre Steinbach, Alfred Eisenbeisser, Andrei Glanzmann, Nicolae Kovacs, Gratian Sepi, Iuliu (Gyula) Bodola et Elemér Kocsis. This team had only two Romanian ethnic players, but only Constantin Stanciu was born in the Old Kingdom, outside Transylvania.

The chiefs of Romanian football tested in 1931 a formula using only Romanian players to confront the main team from Timișoara, Ripensia, a sport

¹⁴ His name was Aurel Guga and he has played for Universitatea Cluj.

¹⁵ Their names are: Alexandru Szatmari, Iosif Bartha, Elemer Hirsch, Nicolae Hönigsberg, Alexandru Kozovits, Emil Rigolo Koch, Adalbert Strock, Francisc Ronnay, Stanislas Micinski and Zoltan Drescher.

¹⁶ The historian Bogdan Popa analyses this phenomenon bringing arguments the media influence and the national attitude promoted by writers like Camil Petrescu. The arguments are available in Bogdan Popa, *Educație fizică, sport și societate în România interbelică* [Physical education, sport and society in interwar Romania], Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2013.

¹⁷ Miklos Hadas, Viktor Karády, “Fotbal și identitate civică (o analiză istorică a semnificațiilor sociale în fotbalul maghiar)” [Football and civic identity (a historical analyze of the social aspects in the Magyar football)], *Secolul 20*, no. 397-400, 1998, p. 282.

force in the West of Romania, which had only one Romanian in the team. Ripensia football club won with 1-0 and this event was an argument against the fans who wanted the “Romanisation” of the national team¹⁸.

The players’ role for the football clubs represents a strong argument for reconciliation between football fans and Hungarian players. The algorithm is simple. The Hungarian ethnic players signed contracts with clubs with Romanian fans. Appreciating their teams, the supporters offer consideration to Hungarian players, which detain important roles in majority of the teams. These players are considered “the good Hungarians”. This perspective imposes a “Fair-play” from supporters’ part over the ethnic sport stars. Therefore, it is obvious that sport performances are important elements in the appreciation of an athlete.

Football offered symbols of reconciliation, especially represented by players from Bucharest based clubs. Few of them were accepted to play at national level, but there are some important examples such as Adalbert Strock, Emerich Vogl, Ladislau Rafinsky or Giusy Baratky. Their performances and the media propagation of their biographies offered a good image over the Hungarian sport star and imposed a general attitude of tolerance. The articles from press destroyed the otherness perception against these players. Fans found that Rafinsky or Vogl¹⁹ speak Romanian, like many other players, despite the myth that Hungarian footballers didn’t want to speak Romanian. They becomed popular playing for important teams, like Rapid Bucharest, Carmen or Ciocanul.

Many of them played in the national team of Romania and, after a period, they offered their services to the Hungarian representative team. The nationalist ideology was one of the causes for this transfer and also the legionary political regime. There are not many cases of Hungarian ethnic players who quited their national team and played for Romania. The most significant case is Giusy Baratky, transformed in a legend for Rapid Bucharest and CAO Oradea fans.

Giusy Baratky was a player born on 14 May 1910 in Oradea. He is considered one of the most important players in Romanian football. Some of them

¹⁸ Cristofor Alexiu Cristi, *Ripensia, nostalgii fotbalistice* [Ripensia, football nostalgias], Timisoara, Helicon, 1992, p. 26.

¹⁹ Octavian Blatt, “Marile vedete. De vorbă cu Vogl, centrul half al României” [The big stars. Talking with Vogl, centre-half of Romania], *Comedia*, 10 September 1927, p. 3.

said that he is the best, especially his former colleagues²⁰, but its lack of notoriety during the communism and after 1989 is putted on the fact that football representatives did not want to promote a Hungarian player. Baratky was called “The blonde wonder”, for his look and his qualities. The celebrity of Baratky had a Balkan resonance and in the press are many articles related with Baratky’s personal life or football career.

Many legends were written around Baratky’s personality. One of them says that he was capable to hit the post 17 or 18 times from 20 attempts, from 16 meters²¹. Another legend says that he missed only one penalty kick in his career against Ripensia in the 1937-1938 season²². His popularity is huge and he personally negotiated contracts for impressive amounts of money. Baratky was “adopted” very well at Rapid Bucharest; even if he did not speak very good Romanian, unlike the other examples. At first, he played in the national team of Hungary, but he changed his option in 1933, and he played 20 matches for Romania after he quitted MTK Budapest. He was appreciated like a hero for his gesture. Baratky is a symbol for reconciliation between Romanian public and football fans with the Hungarians, and their representatives. The supporters accepted and appreciated in time the quality offered by Hungarian footballers.

The interwar period was characterized by a tension in Romania-Hungary relations and between their citizens, engaged in many occasions as supporters in sport confrontations. The conflict had a competitively nuance. We will see that also the sport or its heroes attenuated in other contexts the tensions and promoted some common symbols for Romanians and Hungarians for a long time, even the legionary regime has limited the participation of Jewish and Hungarian sport stars.

Sport and formal reconciliation in the Communism

This balance between conflict and reconciliation in communism, regarding the Romanian-Hungarian relation, is very flexible. After World War II, Romania and Hungary were fighting for the region of Transylvania, trying to attract the support of Moscow. This dispute was won by the Romanians, which had more

²⁰ Ion Viorel, “Legenda uitată a Giuleștiului” [The forgotten legend from Giulești], *Prosport*, 28 May 2010.

²¹ Cibi Braun, *Fotbal ... în glumă* [Football ... in joke], Bucharest, Stadion, 1974, p. 103.

²² Idem, *Din lumea balonului rotund* [From the world of the round ball], Bucharest, Sport-Turism, 1976, p. 27.

influential people at Moscow. The territorial debate was a reason for mistrust between the politicians from both countries²³.

Over this aspect, the first period of the communism in Romania has an international approach in sport. In fact, this is an advantage for the politicians from Bucharest, agreed by Stalin, who proclaimed the international communism ideology. In sport, this attitude is visible in the media and in the official speeches that refer to the athletes from the Hungarian ethnic group. Analysing the press after the World War II we observe an international approach for these athletes. They are not named Romanians or Hungarians. The press utilise the expression “athletes of the Romanian Popular Republic”. The ethnic origin is not specified and often their names are written in a Romanian formula. The motivation for this approach is the idea of the “reconciliation between the communist countries” and the “peace concept”, an ideological aspect promoted by the soviet space. This “absence of fighting”²⁴ created for two decades the image of a theoretical unity and reconciliation in the Romanian sport.

Sport stars from the Hungarian ethnic minority were presented like heroes of the international communist sports’ movement. They were accepted by the sport leaders, who were satisfied with their performances, and by the public. The press articles were concentrated over the idea that the performances are a product of a system, of a communist science and not the result of an individual or a group evolution. This aspect induced an idea of conciliation with the Hungarian group. At a political level, the relation between Romania and Hungary remained cold, because the situation of the two millions of Hungarian people from Romania²⁵.

The period of liberalisation of communism, between 1965 and 1971, and the Romanian attitude of independence against the communist space launched the conflicts with Hungary. First, the political power from Budapest was interested in the Hungarians which lived abroad and this aspect limited the access of sport stars from this minority at the competitions. Their popularity is decreasing and the mediatisation is minor, even if ethnic Hungarian athletes which performed for Romania have performances.

²³ Nandor Bardi, “Ungaria și maghiarii de dincolo de graniță 1948-1989” [Hungary and the Hungarians Abroad 1948 -1989], *Studia Universitas Cibiniensis Series Historica*, vol. 8, 2011, pp. 83-94.

²⁴ Peter Hast Vigor, *The soviet view of war, peace, and neutrality*, London, Routledge, 1975, p. 175.

²⁵ Bennett Kovrig, “Hungary”, in Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (ed.), *Communism in Eastern Europe*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 1984, p. 109.

In 1968, in Romanian football, it was created a trophy to express the public fair-play and to commemorate an interesting footballer, Iosif Petschovschi. He was a symbol for UTA Arad, a team from a town with a big community of Hungarians and Germans. Petschovsky was a complex identity. He was perceived as a stranger, many times considered a Hungarian, even if his father was Slovakian and his mother Romanian, due to the fact that he played in Hungarian championship between 1941 and 1944, under the name József Perényi. The public appreciated him as “a good Magyar”. In a symbolic way, Petschovsky represented a name for reconciliation of football supporters and geographical spaces. After a time, football fans could not remember this player’s sport performances, but they usually associated his name with the idea of non-aggression or non-violence.

This trophy was kept also in Nicolae Ceausescu’s period, because it was a useful argumentation for his concept of “peace”. In this discussion, we have to introduce the concept of Ceausescu’s national communism which became more pre-eminent after the dictator visited China. The new ideology affirms the tradition of ancient Dacian Kingdom from the first century before Christ and the medieval Romanian states. In sport, the communist nationalism proclaims the athletes as national heroes. Even if we speak about Romanian sport stars with Hungarian origins, they were presented as Romanians and were obliged to promote the Party’s ideology. The Romanian communist nationalism tried to stop the Hungarian actions to reaffirm their identity.

In this context, few books about football came to present a friendlier atmosphere. They were written by a coach with a Hungarian origin. His name is Coloman Braun-Bogdan, but in Romania he is known as Cibi Braun. He was a footballer in the interwar period, he played for the Romanian national team, and he was the first coach from the history of the new communist teams, ASA Bucharest and Dinamo Bucharest. We could tell that he was a personality in the Romanian sport.

The apparition of his books in 1974 and 1976²⁶, covers a difficult moment, when the Romanian nationalism was revived. In fact, these books include jokes, funny moments from the Romanian football from interwar period and afterwards, an image of a happy world, with Romanians, Hungarians or Germans. Even if the

²⁶ Cibi Braun, *Fotbal ... în glumă* [Football ... in joke] , Bucharest, Stadion, 1974; Cibi Braun, *Din lumea balonului rotund* [From the world of the round ball], Bucharest, Sport-Turism, 1976.

literary quality is low, the football public has a good reaction and this tempers the conflict between Romanians and Hungarians. This book shows a friendly community of footballers, where the rivalries are left just on the field.

This entire picture permits us to distinct the existence of two spaces with different emotional levels in Romania: the political (represented by the high communist administration) and the human (where we can include the sport phenomenon and the large society). The political dimension is dominated by interests, boycotts, rivalry, and even hate. The human dimension is more malleable, understandable, favorably disposed, and amicable.

In the communist era, Hungarians are considered a cohabitant minority and in theory it is in a relation of conciliation with others minorities and the Romanian majority. In sport, the competitive perspective was present as well. Even in these conditions, the national teams of Romania were examples of conciliation. The teams of feminine gymnastics, handball, or football had almost in every period of time at least a sport star from the Hungarian or German ethnic group in its composition.

Conflicts and reconciliations after 1989

The fall of communism has presented new political perspectives for Romania and Hungary. In this context, Hungary has searched to sustain the rights of its ethnic group from Romania. Also, Romania was confronting with conflicts between Romanians and Hungarians in towns with an important Magyar community. These problems convinced the political institutions to begin actions to stop these tensions²⁷, which finished many times with street fights.

The first inter-state treaty was signed in Timișoara in 1996 and the second was named “the Orbán-Năstase agreement”, signed in December 2001. These formal accords were strengthened by the collaboration between the internal affairs ministries of these countries and by the economic relations. The Romanian-Hungarian relations were often compared with those between France and

²⁷ Constantin Iordachi, “The Romanian-Hungarian Historical Reconciliation Process. An Interpretation”, *Forum Euro-Atlantic*, August 1998, pp. 67-76.

Germany²⁸ and the word reconciliation was promoted with fervor after these moments.

At the same time, the internal politics of Romania was marked after 1989 by the active implication of Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania (DUMR), which has speculated its political role, being represented for many years in the Government. This agreement from 2001 comes after a tensioned period, marked by football matches between Romania and Hungary with conflicts in the sport arenas. The fans of the two teams applied a cultural violence in language regarding the “rights of property” for Transylvania. In Budapest and Bucharest they promoted banners with extreme nationalistic discourses. The media alimented the tension with materials centred on the rivalry between these countries.

In the 2000-2003 period, Vasile Miriuță, a Romanian, without Hungarian roots, decided to play for the Hungarian national team. It was a historical decision, first of this type after the interwar period. For Miriuță it was impossible to be selected in the Romanian national team, due to the high competition, so he decided to play for the Hungarian team. This gesture was perceived with great satisfaction by the Romanian public. If in the interwar period the fans said that Romania was “a second Hungary”, now they perceived this solution as a desperate option for Hungary to take a Romanian without any chance of getting into the national side from Bucharest. For the Hungarian fans this was nothing special because Miriuță played many years in their championship and he was adopted like a normal footballer. The lack of performances for the national team of Hungary and Romania’s positive results in direct matches²⁹, cumulated with Miriuță episode, produced a tolerance of fans concerning the anti-Hungarian attitude.

The most impressive moment of reconciliation started on 8 February 2009, after a tragic event, the death of the handball player Marian Cozma. The athlete, member of the national team of Romania and in contract with the Hungarian team KC Veszprém, was the victim of a stabbing attack that happened in a bar in Veszprém, on 8 February 2009. Some members of KC Veszprém were celebrating the birth of a player’s son and the birthday of another team mate, when they got into an altercation with a gang of 20-25 Romani people. Cozma was stabbed to

²⁸ Levente Salat, Smaranda Enache (eds.), *The Romanian-Hungarian Relations and the French-German Reconciliation*, Cluj-Napoca, Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2004.

²⁹ In 1998, Hungary-Romania 1-1; in 1999, Romania-Hungary 2-0; in 2001, Romania-Hungary 2-0 and Hungary-Romania 0-2.

death, while two other team mates suffered critical injuries. This event shocked Romania and Hungary as well, being analysed days and days in the media of the two countries.

In Michael C. Karl's opinion, "beyond being an indicator of life, death invigorates social system and challenges their values"³⁰. The collective mobilization actions were visible in this context. The "we-they" distinction was made in a good sense, because the Romanians appreciated "their" attitude of friendship over Cozma's death. Hungary expressed its solidarity with Romania, which concluded a spiritual reconciliation.

Marian Cozma was a star in Hungary, so he was honoured on the day of his death by a crowd of about 1,000 gathered in front of the town's sports arena for a torchlight vigil that was mirrored in several other towns and cities across Hungary. For the Romanians, who watched the whole action in front of the TV, this gesture had a great positive impact. Moreover, on 10 February 2009, Marian Cozma's body was also subsequently transferred to Szeged, the home town of KC Veszprém's greatest rivals, where the Hungarian authorities held a goodbye ceremony. Then, a special convoy, with Marian Cozma's body, crossed Romania in an 18-hour journey, with tens of thousands of people applauding it until the convoy arrived in Bucharest. The Romanian TV channels were transformed into anthological media sources.

This episode offers a good image about the Hungarian respect for a Romanian sport star. The Romanian flag was hoisted in Hungary in many contexts related with Marian Cozma, alongside the Hungarian flag. This tragedy united the population of these countries and the pain for this death was assumed by both sides. From time to time, the commemoration of this handball star gathered the two countries together. In August 2009, before the football match Hungary-Romania on Ferenc Puskas Stadium, it was organized one minute of silence for Marian Cozma. Many fans waved the Romanian flag and on a big screen images with the former handball player were presented in Romanian and Magyar.

Furthermore, the Magyar producer Kalomista Gabor made a movie about Marian Cozma's death. This movie was seen in many cinema theatres and on TV. Also, his Hungarian fans created a website to honour his memory, in Romanian,

³⁰ Michael C. Karl, *Endings : a sociology of death dying*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 7.

Magyar, and English. Over the next 3 years, they organized reunions, political rallies, and concerts in the memory of the handball player and against violence. This phenomenon generated and promoted a motto, attributed to Marian Cozma: “Even the world is full of hate; our hearts are still full of love”.

To better understand the reconciliation realized by Marian Cozma’s death, we have to consider as an argument the situation from Covasna region, where a big community of Hungarians lives and where conflicts between them and Romanians are frequent. On 9 February 2012, at Sfântu Gheorghe, the most important town from Covasna, the Commission for Youngsters and Sport organized a commemoration ceremony for Marian Cozma. The president of this organism, with a political role in region, Mădălin Guruianu, said with this occasion that “Marian Cozma is the symbol of Romanian-Hungarian friendship and non-aggression”. Also, in the spring of 2012, the sentence in the Cozma case was perceived in the Hungarian society to “mild” or clement, and the Minister of Justice, Tibor Navracsics, asked to the Supreme Court to revise the case³¹.

The period of sportive silence between the two countries was interrupted at the end of 2011. December was marked by the hockey conflict from Miercurea Ciuc, a Romanian city with a significant Hungarian minority. The incident took place at the start of the ice hockey game that pitted Romania against Hungary. The Romanian players, who were mostly ethnic Hungarians, remained silent when Romania’s anthem was played at the start of the game but then sang Hungary’s anthem along with the Hungarian team. This episode produced reaction in Romanian sport space and at the political level. The scandal was huge. Many voices blamed the political value of this conflict and offered examples about how the sport was a way of reconciliation in Romania and an option for ethnic integration.

The Romanian Ice Hockey Federation, with a Romanian president of Hungarian ethnicity, affirmed in an official statement that the important aspects are: the performance (a 4-1 victory) and dedication of the team, and not a moment

³¹ Margit Feischmidt, Kristóph Szombati, Péter Szuhay, “Collective criminalization of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Social causes, circumstances, consequences”, Sophie Body-Gendrot, Mike Hough, Klara Kerezsi, René Lévy, Sonja Snacken (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of European Criminology*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 174.

with political implications. The official accused the mass-media attack³², shortly after another event with ethnic implications in Romanian ice hockey Romanian. Mass-media presented a week earlier the case of Romanian player Florin Cosmin Marinescu, who was insulted and battered by his U16 team-mates of Hungarian ethnicity in a national training camp in Miercurea Ciuc. The first chronological case was so special because it happened in the context of Romania's national day, December 1st. These episodes were analysed by the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee and the National Council for Combating Discrimination. In such moments, the nationalist attitude becomes a strong force in Romania and every political side tries to speculate the electoral capital by condemning the gestures.

These are some symbolic elements in Romanian-Hungarian relations on fans level, who kept the media attention and which had social and political implications. These examples express the idea that sport was perceived as an important instrument for the relations between neighbours. An historical conflict was interrupted many times by collaborations in sport. This domain was in the same time a space for the discharge of national ideas, ethnic interest or individual thinking.

The situation of conflict burst again in 2013, when the Romanian national football team confronted Hungary, in the preliminaries for World Cup Brazil 2014. In Budapest, the game was disputed without fans, at the Ferenc Puskas Stadium, due to a punishment applied by FIFA for racist and anti-Semitic attitude of the Hungarian supporters in a match with Israel. In Bucharest, the Hungarian fans were followed at every step by the Romanian media, as they destroyed the old city centre of Bucharest and had fights with the Romanian force orders. The conflict was obvious and the tension around the game was visible.

We assist at a permanent oscillation of conflict with reconciliation in a space where the fair-play tries to impose a harmony between Romanians and Hungarians. These dissensions are built in time, but it seems that periodically symbols of reconciliation appear, validated by the both sides. The events mentioned in this paper are disputes most of them happened in the Romanian territory, fact that shows the interest of Hungary over this problems. The sport stars taken in discussion are representative for both sport societies.

³² Mihai George, *Ice Hockey: Ethnic incidents at Romania vs. Hungary game*, 19th December 2011, available online at the following address: <http://www.nineoclock.ro/ice-hockey-ethnic-incidents-at-romania-vs-hungary-game/>.

Conclusions

Over the general image of rivalry between Romanians and Hungarians, every case of reconciliation is a visible break. In contrast, with the cultural violence, the elements of harmony take power and force. Statistically speaking, it is impossible to have a linear path of rivalry, and the existence of these personalities represents an exception for this climate of tension. This atmosphere was present frequently at a political level and in the media. There are some rare cases of general concord in a space full of propaganda, even if we speak about the interwar period, the Communism or the recent years.

We cannot analyse these symbols without presenting the context of rivalry. Their selection could be considered subjective, but these cases are suggestive for the evolution of the ethnic attitude in Romania, utilising sport as a space of taking the pulse of society. These personalities are characterized by notoriety and they are appreciated like good examples for Romanians and Hungarians as well.

Every person presented as a symbol of reconciliation has an important grade of charisma³³ and its notoriety is bi-national: Romanian and Hungarian. They are not every time aware of their role as a mediator. The conciliation is the main result of their presence and the media is the propagandistic channel which transmits the message.

We can identify two different typologies of these symbols of reconciliation. Firstly, we have the persons imposed by the system and the symbols of reconciliation chosen by the public. The first typology becomes known by utilising the willing of the state and its institutions, and the second category is a result of the performances made by those symbols.

The presence of these actors concludes that the national identity in sports has a certain degree of permeability. This aspect is related to the fact that the term of national identity is built in relation with other ethnic or national groups. Because a nation in contemporary times could not be considered as an isolated identity, it was then defined in relation with other/s identities. The idea of “Romanian” was disposed to integrate some exceptional qualities in sports and indirectly to affirm

³³ In the Webberian way of understanding.

their individual value, but often with references to people who don't have Romanian origin.

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