

ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY AND HETEROGENEITY IN BIHOR COUNTY IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

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Abstract: The study of ethnic communities has aroused and continues to arouse the interest of specialists from various scientific disciplines, geographers, historians, sociologists, jurists, political scientists, etc. This study aims to highlight, from a geographical perspective, the evolution of ethnic communities, respectively the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity in Bihor County in the first years of the 3rd millennium. For this purpose, the evolution of the communities of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks was analyzed in the censuses of 2002, 2011 and 2021 in order to be able to capture the changes occurring, from a numerical point of view, within these ethnic communities. The ethnic homogeneity index was also calculated, which highlights those areas where there is ethnic homogeneity and those with ethnic heterogeneity.

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Key words: ethnic communities, ethnic homogeneity, ethnic heterogeneity

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INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnic communities represents an essential component from the perspective of approaching the demographic structures present on the territory of the states. The research of these communities is an old concern, it has an interdisciplinary character, in their study bringing the contribution of geographers, historians, sociologists, jurists, etc. (Birnil, 2006; Dincă et al., 2012; Dogan, 1999; Dumitrescu and Manea, 2008). Concerns of this kind are quite old, but an explosion of them occurs with the beginning of the 20th century when the notions of ethnicity, ethnic and inter-ethnic relations are often encountered. The ethnic component becomes interesting both from the point of view of the specificity induced by the presence of ethnic communities within the territory, but also from the perspective of the political discourse, of the problems it generates (Csergo, 2007; Owsinski and Eberhardt, 2003).

The proposed study aims at the geographical specificity of an analysis of this kind, namely the way of evolution from a numerical point of view and the geographical distribution of the ethnic groups presents on the territory of Bihor County within the timeframe 2002-2021, as well as highlighting the degree of ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity. For Bihor County, the geographical literature aimed at the study of the ethnic component is well represented by older and new works belonging to geographers and historians, sociologists, etc.

Some reference works date from the end of the last century and have dealt with the issue of the ethnic component regarding the emergence and evolution of ethnic communities, inter-ethnic relations, electoral behavior within Bihor County, whether it is Hungarians, Slovaks, Roma, Jews, etc. Such materials were developed, either for the entire county or only for certain areas of the county by Bodocan, 2001; Deac et al., 2023a, b; Filimon, 2007, 2014; Filimon, 2012; Ilieș, 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1998, 2018; Josan et al., 1994; Ropa, 2020; Stupariu 2020.

A reference work for Bihor County is *Ethnicity, Confession and Electoral Behavior in Crișana and Maramureș* (Ilieș, 1998) which deals with the emergence (colonization, migrations, settlements, purges, electoral behavior and inter-ethnic relations) of cohabiting minorities in these areas, including Bihor County, from the first available information until the end of the 20th century. Along with the mentioned literature, the real help for the proposed study is the statistical information regarding the ethnic communities provided by the three analyzed censuses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Areal study

Bihor County is in the northwestern part of the country, limited in the western part by the border with Hungary and from north to south by the counties of Satu Mare, Sălaj, Cluj, Alba and Arad. It occupies an area of 7,535 km², administratively it is made up of a number of 10 TAUs, respectively 10 cities: Oradea, the county seat municipality, followed by the municipalities of Salonta, Marghita, Beiuș and the cities of Aleșd, Nucet,

Săcueni, Ștei, Valea lui Mihai and Vașcău. A number of 90 communes are added to these cities (Figure 1).

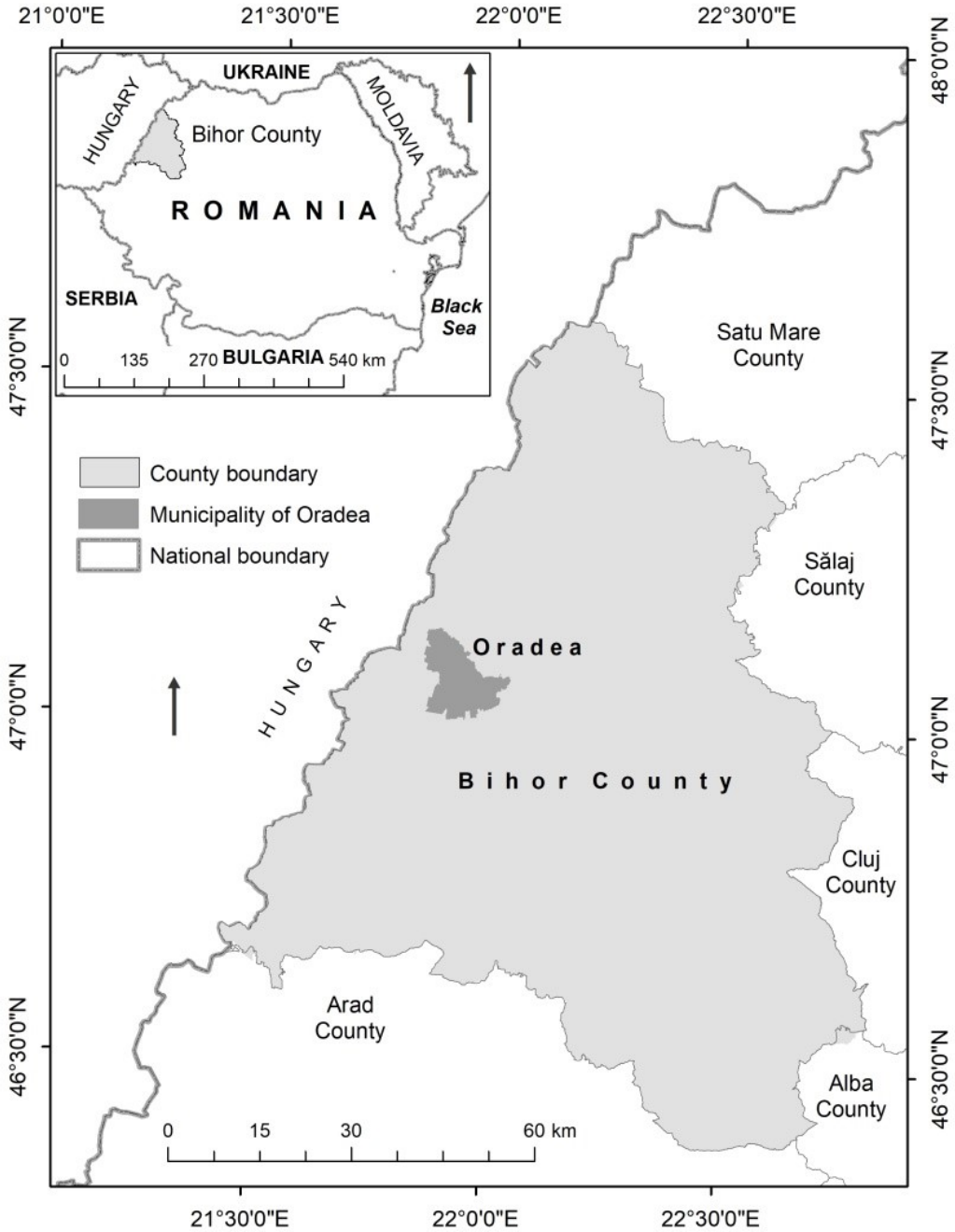


Figure 1. Geographical position of Bihor County

It should be mentioned that the current administrative component underwent changes in the period 2002-2011, respectively in 2003 when, through a referendum, a number of five communes appeared through administrative reorganization: Gepiu, Sânicolaul Român by separation from Cefa commune, Paleu from Cetariu, Roșiori from Diosig, Tămășeu from Biharea. Another moment is represented by the year 2002, when Săcuieni commune obtains the status of a city, and later in 2007, Toboliu commune emerges by separating from Girișu de Criș commune.

From a demographic point of view, the population of Bihor County recorded a numerical decrease in population from 2002, when it recorded 600,876 inhabitants, to 551,297 inhabitants in the 2021 census. This decrease in the number of inhabitants is also reflected in what concerns the current ethnic component.

Research methods

The analysis of the ethnic component of Bihor County, on TAU level, was carried out based on the statistical information provided by the 2002, 2011 and 2021 censuses (National Institute of Statistics). From the total of ethnicities present in the territory of the county, the communities of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks were analyzed because they are the most representative, respectively the total number of each community and the weight within both the county and the component TAUs. The rest of the ethnic minorities present, Italians, Germans, Ukrainians, etc. by their numbers are irrelevant for the present study.

To highlight the degree of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity, we used the ethnic homogeneity index (Vert, 2001) calculated according to the formula

$$O_{et} = 10 - \frac{\sum m \times Nm}{pt}, \text{ where:}$$

O_{et} = the ethnic homogeneity index,

$\sum m$ = the number of people who make up the ethnic group

Nm = the number of ethnic groups

Pt = the total population

If the value obtained fell within the range of 7.51-10, it means ethnic homogeneity, the values between 5.1-7.70 define a relative homogeneity and the range 5.0-0 ethnic heterogeneity.

The values thus obtained, respectively the percentage values of the ethnicities at the three censuses and the ethnic homogeneity/heterogeneity index for each territorial unit were then represented cartographically using the ArcGis 10.6 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Romanians, although they recorded a numerical decrease from 446,167 inhabitants in 2002 to 347,148 inhabitants in 2021, remained the majority population with a percentage of 63% of the total population of Bihor County. Percentagewise, the Romanian population decreased from 74.3% in the 2002 census to 63% in 2021, with the mention that the most significant reduction of the Romanian population characterizes the period 2002-2011 when the ethnic Romanian population decreases from 74.3% to 63.6%. This decrease is the result of the values of the components of the natural and migratory movement of the population, to which are also added socio-economic and political events (the

extension of the transition period towards a market economy, industrial restructuring, unemployment, Romania's accession to the EU, etc.).

On TAU level, the most representative decreases were recorded, in the analyzed period, in five of them: Budureasa (-14%), Lăzăreni (-14%), Șoimi (-22%), Tinca (-12 %) and Tulca (-15%). The decrease in the ethnic Romanian population is compensated by the increase in the share of the ethnic Roma population within these communes. From the point of view of ethnic homogeneity, it should be mentioned that the Romanian population was and is homogeneous in a number of 52 TAUs out of 100 (Figure 2).

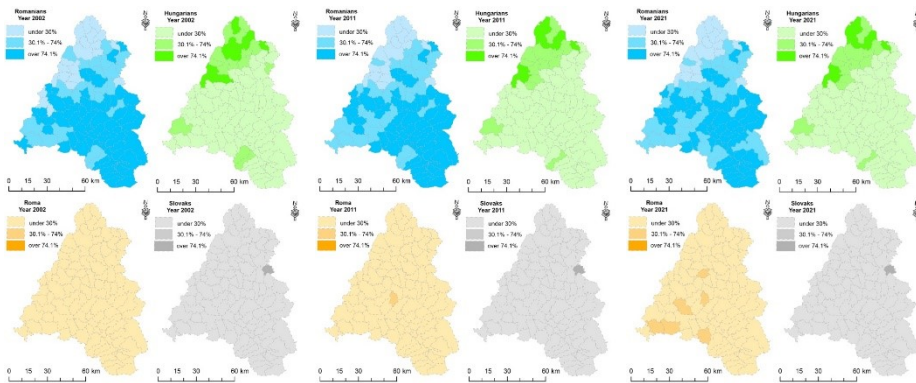


Figure 2. The share of ethnic groups in the 2002, 2011 and 2022 censuses

In a number of five communes: Buduslău, Cherechiu, Sălacea, Sălard and Șinteu, the ethnic Romanian population is poorly represented at less than 2%. At the level of cities, the Romanian population is a minority in a number of three cities: Săcueni (6%), Valea lui Mihai (11.6%) and Salonta (36.1%); in the other cities it represents the majority: in Oradea (67.5%), Marghita (50.5%) or is homogeneous in Beiuș (81.3%), Nucet (89.0%), Ștei (87.9%) and Vașcău (90.4%).

The Hungarians had a similar evolution to the Romanian population, decreasing numerically and percentagewise from 153,170 inhabitants (24%) in 2002, to 112,298 inhabitants (20.3%) at the 2021 census. Similar to Romanians and Hungarians, they recorded the most significant decrease in the interval 2002-2011, from 24% to 20.4% in 20011.

At the level of the county seat, namely the city of Oradea, the ethnic Hungarian population decreased from 23.1% in 2002 to 18.2% in 2021. Within the communes, the largest decreases are recorded in Cherechiu (-18%), Buduslău (-10 %), Tarcea (-7%).

On TAU level, Hungarians show ethnic homogeneity in the city of Valea lui Mihai (79.14%) and are the majority in the cities of Salonta (53%), Săcueni (62.2%), but are absent from the cities of Nucet and Vașcău.

Within the communes, a compact group of communes, cantoned in the north-western part of the county, is individualized, namely the communes: Biharea, Borș, Buduslău, Cherechiu, Sălacea, Șimian, Tămășeu and Vișoara, where Hungarians are homogeneous (Figure 2). More significant communities of Hungarian population are present in the city of Marghita (34.8%), the communes

of Abrămuț (50%), Cetariu (61.8%), Curtuișeni (54.7%), Diosig (45.3%), Paleu (50.8%), Sâniob (60.6%), Sălard (65.2%), Tarcea (65.5%), Târcaia (52.4%).

It should be specified that in a significant number of TAUs, the Hungarian population is not present at all (Buntești, Căbești, Ceica, Curățele, Criștioru de Jos, Copăcel, Câmpani, Drăgești, Rieni, Roșia, Șoimi, Șinteu, Vârciorog,) or it boils down to the presence of several families (Abram, Avram Iancu, Boianu Mare, Cefa, Mădăras, Măgești, Popești, Toboliu, Tulca, etc.).

The Roma population, unlike Romanians and Hungarians, had a different evolution, in the sense that it registered a constant increase throughout the entire period, from 31,401 (5.2%) inhabitants in 2002 to 36,173 (6.6%) in 2021. And for this ethnic group, the period 2002-2011 represents the period in which the largest increase is recorded from 5.2% to 6%.

Even if reported at the level of Bihor County, the increase in the share of the Roma population within the total population is not spectacular, at the level of territorial administrative units, special situations appear. Thus, spectacular increases are recorded in municipalities such as Avram Iancu, Batăr, Ciumeghiu Curtuișeni, Drăgești Lăzăreni, where the Roma ethnic group recorded increases of 10% in the analyzed interval. The most significant increases are in Diosig commune with 14% and Șoimi commune with 18.4% in 2021 compared to 2002.

Within the cities, the most numerous Roma communities are in Săcueni 25% in 2021 compared to 15% in 2002 followed by Aleșd with 15.6% in 2021 compared to 9.6% in 2002. If in the case of the city of Aleșd the growth of the Roma population was linear throughout the period, in the case of the city of Săcueni the most significant increase occurred in the 2011-2021 timeframe from 15.2% to 25.1%. This increase can also be attributed to the city status being obtained in 2004, a fact that acted as a magnet for the Roma communities in the neighboring communes.

A situation that is somewhat difficult to explain is recorded in the city of Oradea, where the Roma ethnic group decreased from 1.2% in 2002 to 0.7% in 2021. A possible explanation would be the fact that part of the Roma population in the city declared themselves to be Romanian or Hungarian, knowing that this practice exists amongst them.

In parallel with these increases on territorial level, situations of decrease in the Roma population are also recorded. Such cases are found in the communes of Copăcel (-4%), Holod (-10%), Lugașu de Jos (-12.7%). Also within the county, a number of fourteen TAUs are registered where this ethnicity is missing: Ștei, Aștileu, Buntești, Căbești, Căpâlna, Câmpani, Curățele, Lazuri de Beiuș, Pocola, Sâniob, Sârbi, Târcaia, Vișoara and Vârciorog (Figure 2).

The Slovak ethnic group decreased from 7369 inhabitants, i.e. 1.2% in 2002, to 4787 inhabitants (0.9%) in 2021. And in the case of this ethnic group, even if it is a decrease, it was a linear one, without there being a period in which the decrease recorded very high values.

In the analyzed period, it is worth noting that in some communes, even if it did not hold large shares, this ethnic group disappeared. This is the case of the communes Abram, Abrămuț, Balc, Olcea, Sârbi, Spinuș, Tăuteu, Țețchea, Vișoara. Currently, this ethnic group has more important communities in a number of ten TAUs. In only one TAU it shows the character of homogeneity, namely in Șinteu commune, where it has a percentage of 94.7% of the total population compared to 98.2% in 2002 (Figure 2).

More representative Slovak communities are present in the communes of Derna (16%), Popești (12.1%), Suplacu de Barcău (15.1%), Mădăras (6.2%), Lugașu de Jos (4.7%), Brusturi (3.5%), Aușeu (4.3%), Aștileu (3.8%).

Within the cities, this community is more important in the city of Aleșd, where it represents 6.2% of the total population and where this community did not register a decrease in the analyzed timeframe.

From an ethnic point of view, related to the degree of ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity, following the analysis carried out, the ethnic map of Bihor County is presented as follows (Figure 3).

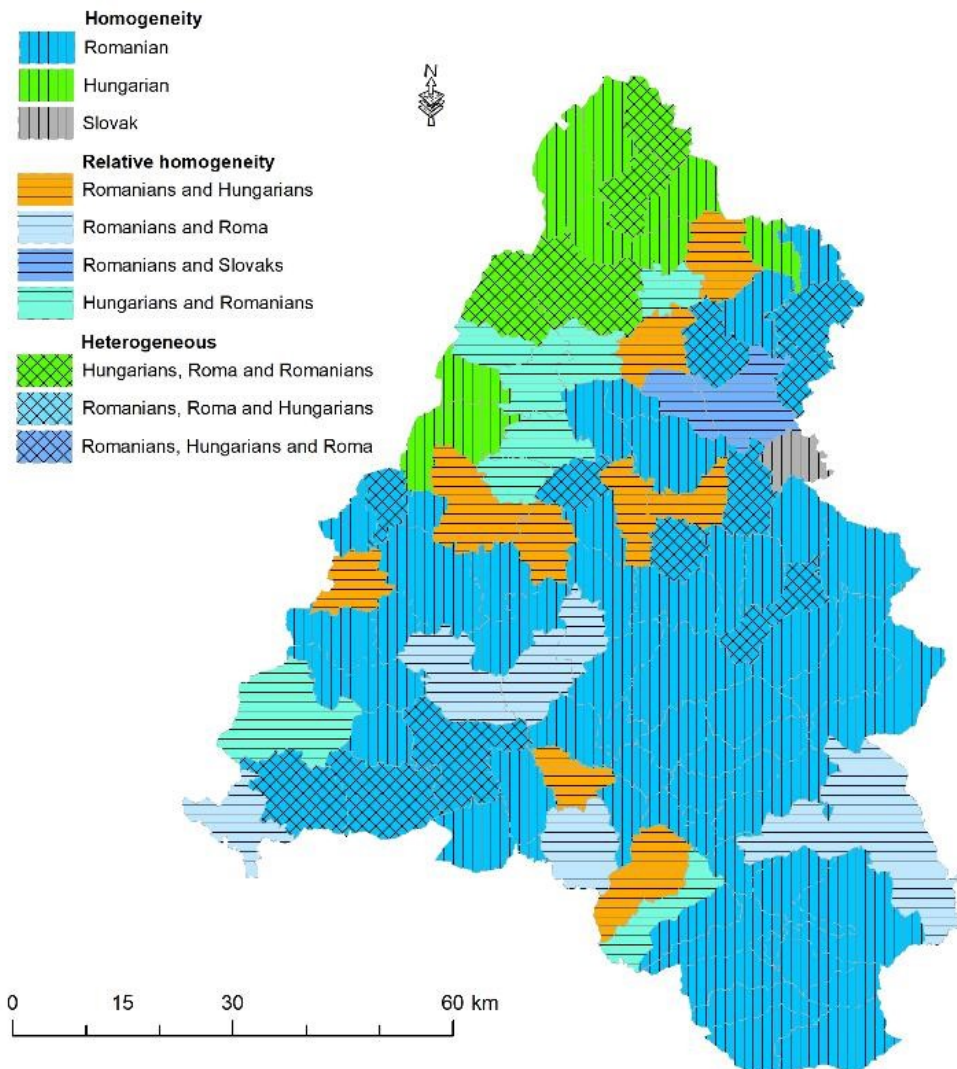


Figure 3. The degree of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity in Bihor County

Ethnic homogeneity (7.51-10) characterizes a number of 61 territorial entities, of which 51 TAUs are characterized by Romanian ethnic homogeneity, 9 TAUs show Hungarian ethnic homogeneity, and only one commune, respectively Şinteu, shows Slovak ethnic homogeneity (Figure 3).

The second category is represented by the one with a relative ethnic minority (5.1-7.50) (Figure 3), a number of 25 administrative units are included, within which there is a majority population doubled by one ethnicity or another with close values. And within them, four subtypes are individualized, respectively a number of 9 TAUs: Oradea, Marghita, Lugaşu de Jos, Căpâlna, Finiş, Sânicolau Roman, Oşorhei, Tileagd show a relative Romanian-Hungarian homogeneity.

The second sub-type, relative Romano-Roma homogeneity, is characteristic in 6 communes: Drăgeşti, Husasău de Tinca, Lăzăreni, Budureasa, Avram Iancu and Şoimi.

The third subtype, relative Romanian-Slovak homogeneity, is found in only two communes in the county, namely Popeşti and Derna.

The last subtype, relative Hungarian-Romanian homogeneity, is present in a number of 8 territorial entities: Abrămuţ, Cetariu, Paleu, Roşiori, Salonta, Sâniob, Sălard and Târcaia.

Ethnic heterogeneity (5.0-0) is specific to a number of 14 territorial units, and just as in the case of relative homogeneity, several subtypes appear grafted onto a basic population to which larger communities belonging to at least two other ethnicities are added from those analyzed (Figure 3).

The first subtype is defined by ethnic heterogeneity grafted onto a Romanian population to which the Hungarian and Roma population is added. This situation is present in six communes: Girişu de Criş, Suplacu de Barcău, Tăuteu, Tinca, Țeţchea, Vadu Crişului and the city of Aleşd.

The second subtype is based on the Hungarian population to which Roma and Romanians are added, it is found in a number of three communes: Curtuşişeni, Diosig, Tarcea and the town of Săcueni.

The third subtype of ethnic heterogeneity is based on the Romanian population to which Roma and Hungarians are added. It is present in the communes of Balc, Batăr, Ciumeghiu and Ineu (Figure 3).

CONCLUSIONS

From a numerical point of view, the decrease in the population of Bihor County also left its mark on the ethnic component. The ethnicities most affected by this decrease are the Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak ethnicities. The only ethnic group that registered a slight demographic increase is the Roma ethnic group, otherwise it is natural because they are known for their higher birth rate.

The distribution in the territory from a spatial point of view does not show differences in the analyzed interval, each ethnic group keeping the traditional areas.

On county level, the majority character of the Romanian ethnic population is still maintained, to which are added larger communities of Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks, the other ethnicities being poorly represented. Moreover, the county, by the value of the ethnic homogeneity index (6.5), is included in the framework of relative homogeneity.

Territorially, an area appears, including the largest part of the county, which concentrates towns, communes with a homogeneous Romanian population, to which is added, in the northwest part, a strong Hungarian area, and in the eastern part of the county, at the border with the county of Sălaj, there is a large community of Slovaks.

The strong Romanian character of the county is confirmed by the degree of ethnic homogeneity present in a number of 51 TAUs, to which are added other 17 territorial unites with relative homogeneity grafted onto a majority Romanian population. In the case of the other ethnic groups, the ethnic homogeneity is present in nine for the Hungarians and one for the Slovaks.

The Roma ethnic group, although it has registered an increase, does not have ethnic homogeneity in any TAU, moreover it does not constitute the basis for relative homogeneity, being present as a component in the 14 units defined by ethnic heterogeneity.

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