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## **Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Ethnic Lobby Success in the United States: the Case of HHRF**

Ethnic interests influencing U.S. foreign policy making has been a debated issue by American political scientists for a long time, especially since the end of the Cold War. There have been many papers, articles, studies and books published on the significance of ethnic lobbies in the United States. Scholars are divided on the question whether the involvement of ethnic groups' interest in foreign policy shaping is beneficial for the U.S. or whether ethnic lobbies represent a real threat to American interest (if 'American interest' can be interpreted without the involvement of ethnic groups living in the U.S., at all).

The aim of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to examine and interpret the scientific discourse on ethnic influence on American foreign policy with the help of a case study that may contradict the theoretical definitions of ethnic lobby success: the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation's greatest lobby success in 1987, when this American-based Hungarian lobby organization contributed to the suspension of Romania's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, building their strategy entirely on Romania's human rights violations and Ceausescu's maltreatment of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. I analyze the case study with the methodology drawn up by the best-known ethnic lobby literature, and my hypothesis is that the existing literature does not explain exhaustively the success of the HHRF in 1987.

The first part of the paper presents the general American political discourse on ethnic interest groups' influence on American foreign policy, as well as the logic of lobbying in the United States. The second

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the abbreviated version of the author's thesis submitted to PPKE BTK English Studies in 2013.

section is dedicated to the case study on the HHRF. I would like to mention here Mr László Hámos, founder and president of the HHRF, to whom I am very grateful for all his help. I am especially grateful for the numerous HHRF documents he made available to me and the interview he gave me via Skype. Throughout the paper, when talking about ethnic (or the diaspora) lobby in the States, I use it in the sense of Yossi Shain's definition<sup>2</sup>: "people with common ethnic-national-religious origin who reside outside a claimed or an independent home territory. They regard themselves and/or are regarded by others as members or potential members of their country of origin".<sup>3</sup>

### **Theoretical frames of reference of ethnic lobbies in the United States; Theoretical debate on the evaluation of ethnic lobby influence**

The influential power of ethnic lobbies on United States foreign policy has been a debated issue among political scientists, especially since the end of the Cold War. Although the political activism of ethnic (or diaspora) groups in the U.S. has a rather long history, the debate on whether their influence is beneficial or harmful in American politics has come to the forefront of political and scientific discourse only after 1990. While the international atmosphere and the balance of power during the Cold War defined very strictly the foreign policy agenda of the United States, the collapse of communism brought a totally new age of international politics, in which the U.S. found itself without a coherent and unambiguous foreign policy strategy. This abrupt political vacuum and the lack of a constant threat (communism) made political scientists reconsider American interest as well as American "obligations" on the international level. The debate shed light on the

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<sup>2</sup> Shain, Y., 1999. *Marketing the American creed abroad: diasporas in the U.S. and their homelands*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.8

<sup>3</sup> Since the HHRF is an organization working for the rights of Hungarian minorities living outside Hungary, the HHRF cannot be regarded as a classical ethnic lobby organization in the sense Shain defines this category. However, since the members of HHRF consider themselves as part of the Hungarian diaspora in the US, and maintain relationships with every Hungarian government since 1989, the HHRF can be listed among ethnic lobby organizations.

issue of ethnic interest groups' influence on American policy making; although the phenomenon had already existed since the founding of the United States, it received relatively little attention until the 1990s, even if some papers were published on the topic in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

Although the worries expressed because of the growing influence of ethnic lobby groups in the States has its roots in the experience of the changing international environment after 1990, the fear of "divided loyalties" is old. As Ambrosio puts it, since the U.S. was founded and populated by immigrants, there were always groups that had "significant affective and political ties to their homelands", which might result in divided or conflicted loyalties. "Hyphenated Americans"<sup>5</sup>, thus, have been representing the challenge of standing for the interest of the former homeland at the expense of U.S. national interests.<sup>6</sup> Best-known experts on ethnic lobbies – Yossi Shain, Thomas Ambrosio, Tony Smith – all regard the rise of multiculturalism (1970s and 1980s) as the turning point in the evaluation of multiple identities in American society. Ambrosio claims that multiculturalism has brought "greater acceptance of multiple identities (...) without calling into question the loyalty of those holding multiple identities" within the American society.<sup>7</sup> Next to multiculturalism, the success of the human rights movement in the U.S. has also greatly contributed to the growing tolerance of ethnicity, just like the revised Immigration Act of 1965, which resulted in the growing number of foreign-born Americans who were ready to seek influence on American foreign policy in order to help their ancestral homelands.<sup>8</sup>

However, this growing acceptance of ethnic identity in the American society did not bring along a consensus on the evaluation of

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<sup>4</sup> Ambrosio, T., 2002. *Ethnic identity groups and U.S. foreign policy*. Westport, Conn. p.4, Shain, 1999, p.1 and Shain, Y., 1994. *Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy. Political Science Quarterly* 1994 Vol. 109 No. 5. p.812

<sup>5</sup> Hyphenated Americans is the common term which refers to immigrants in the United States who have – more or less – kept their original national identity even after settling down in the New World, eg. Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Hungarian-Americans etc.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrosio, 2002, p.4-5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Shain 1999, p.22

ethnic lobby influence on American foreign policy in academic and professional circles. Whether the ethnic lobby is a positive or negative phenomenon in American policy making has remained and still is a debated issue among experts. The two main conflicting approaches can be shortly summarized as follows:

1. *Ethnic lobbies are highly influential on U.S. foreign policy and represent a real threat to the American national interest.*

2. *The significance of ethnic influence on U.S. foreign policy is exaggerated, and, even if they are influential, they serve a good purpose, i.e. the promotion of American values in the World.*<sup>9</sup>

Among the representatives of the first approach are both left-wing and right-wing American political scientists, like Bruce Robbins, Samuel P. Huntington, Tony Smith and Arthur M. Schlesinger.<sup>10</sup> **Bruce Robbins**, a leftist thinker claims that ethnic involvement in U.S. foreign policy is “suspicious”, and considers ethnic diaspora members discredited. As Shain formulates Robbins’ arguments, “diasporic information or opinions on homeland affairs are to be seen as being less reliable because these individuals have split their lives between two countries”, and, “by the time ethnic voices are heard, they are almost by definition no longer authentically ethnic, so their value has been lost”.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, **S. P. Huntington** and other rightist scholars – like A. M. Schlesinger – argue that it leads to incoherence if the ethnic voice is reflected in foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, since U.S. foreign policy is in a state of confusion after the Cold War, Huntington goes so far as advising a policy that limits the “diversion of American resources to the service of particularistic subnational, transnational, and non-national interests”.<sup>13</sup> In Huntington’s view, American foreign policy should be based upon, just as in the era of the Cold War, the “Anglo-American establishment”<sup>14</sup>,

<sup>9</sup> Gregg, H. S., 2002. *Divided They Conquer: The Success of Armenian Ethnic Lobbies in the US. Working paper, MIT*, [online] Available at <[http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/pubs/rwp/13\\_divided.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/pubs/rwp/13_divided.pdf)> [Accessed 5 February 2013] pp.2-5

<sup>10</sup> Shain, 1999, p.203, and Gregg, 2002, pp2-5.

<sup>11</sup> Shain, 1999, p.204

<sup>12</sup> Shain, 1999, p.205

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Shain, 1999, p.206

and any other influences should be disregarded when formulating foreign policy.<sup>15</sup>

Let me mention a third representative who does not favor the activity of ethnic lobby groups. In the introduction of his book "*Foreign Attachments. The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*", **Tony Smith** argues that the issue of ethnic lobby influence on foreign policy illuminates the contradictions of pluralist democracy, and raises the question "how to balance the rights and interests of the organized few against the rights and interests of the often inattentive many". Therefore Tony Smith claims that "... the negative consequences of ethnic involvement may well outweigh the undoubted benefits this activism at times confers on America in world affairs".<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Smith shares the view of Huntington concerning the erosion of the national interest with the involvement of ethnic interests<sup>17</sup>. However, Smith's explanation for the negative consequences of ethnic influence is based not exclusively on the multiculturalism of the American society, but also on the nature of foreign policy making in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Among the opponents of ethnic influence on American foreign policy, Tony Smith is the least radical one, suggesting that a rational debate should be opened on the framework of ethnic influence on American foreign policy in order to reach a coherent and consistent foreign policy strategy.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now turn our attention to the other side, led by **Yossi Shain** and **Thomas Ambrosio**, who do not consider ethnic lobbies as a negative feature of American foreign policy. On the contrary, they claim that ethnic involvement in policy making can be rather beneficial for the United States. Shain asserts that "the negative impact of ethnic involvement in U.S. foreign affairs has been exaggerated and even falsified", moreover, "[i]nvolvement in U.S. foreign policy is in fact often one of the clearest indications that an ethnic community

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<sup>15</sup> Huntington, S. P., 1997. The Erosion of the National Interest. *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1997, 28-49, Shain, 1999, p.206 and Gregg, 2002, p.3

<sup>16</sup> Smith, T., 2000. *Foreign attachments : the power of ethnic groups in the making of American foreign policy*. Cambridge, Mass; London, England: Harvard University Press p.2

<sup>17</sup> Smith, 2000, p.13

<sup>18</sup> Smith, 2000, pp.85-94 and Gregg, 2002, p.3

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 2000, p.17

has ‘arrived’ in American society, and that it has demonstrated its willingness not only to reinforce and uphold American values such as democracy and pluralism inside America, but to promote these values abroad”.<sup>20</sup> (Hence the title of Shain’s book: *Marketing the American Creed Abroad*.) Furthermore, Shain adds that diasporas “are more likely to support existing regimes whose policies coincide with American liberalism and/or U.S. foreign objectives and actively oppose those which do not”.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Ambrosio considers that “the rise of identity politics in U.S. foreign policy is a natural outcome of the changes in the American polity that have opened the policy process to greater influence by societal interest groups”, be it ethnic, racial or religious.<sup>22</sup> After summarizing the most common arguments in favor of (multicultural foreign policy reflects the American liberal democratic ethos; respects diversity; can correct former “white” foreign policies; helps resist isolationism; spreads democratic principles throughout the world; reinforces U.S. interests) and against (ethnic interest groups put their interests ahead of American national interests; undercut democratic principles; may be agents of foreign governments; promote incoherent foreign policy; might prevent necessary changes in U.S. foreign policy; may become simply too powerful; can involve the U.S. in conflicts where no American interest is threatened) the ethnic involvement in American foreign policy, Ambrosio concludes that “[a]lthough in some cases ethnic identity groups may have a disproportionate level of influence over specific policies, it is important not to exaggerate their power. Only in very rare circumstances is the influence of a particular ethnic lobby the sole factor in determining policy. Instead, ethnic identity groups merely play an important, and indeed legitimate, role in the overall foreign policy process. (...) [T]he diversity that enriches our domestic life may, under certain circumstances, likewise enrich our foreign relations.”<sup>23</sup>

Having seen the most important points of the debate among American political scientists on the influence of ethnic groups on

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<sup>20</sup> Shain, 1999, p.8

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ambrosio, 2002, p.4

<sup>23</sup> Ambrosio, 2002, pp.200-212

American foreign policy, in the next part we will pay attention to the nature of ethnic lobbying in the U.S.

### **Ethnic lobbying in the American political system**

What enables ethnic interest groups to influence the American decision making process? According to Tony Smith, besides the social character of the United States (i.e. nation of immigrants) it is “the structure of American democracy that allows ethnic communities, and a much wider range of civic interest groups in general, access to policymaking”.<sup>24</sup> The system of “checks and balances” prevents the monopolization of power, which results in a more democratic (or, rather, decentralized) policy making process. The fact that the American political system is decentralized and pluralist makes it easier for interest groups to access political actors. Shain stresses the power of individual members of Congress, which facilitates interest groups to easily exercise influence on important decision makers, as well as their accessibility to the media.<sup>25</sup> Smith identifies three ways for interest groups to exercise influence on American political actors: through vote; campaign financing; and by an organizational body articulating clear demands, mobilizing their constituents and building alliances with other groups.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of voting, it is important to bear in mind that it is not the national (presidential) level of elections that depends the most on ethnic identity groups, but rather it is the congressional elections. “Because of the role of primaries<sup>27</sup> in congressional elections, the decentralized character of the Congress itself, and the absence of strong mechanisms of national party discipline, voting pressure on Congress (especially on the House of Representatives) is a more likely source of access to decisionmaking for ethnic lobbies”, Smith

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, 2000, p.86-89

<sup>25</sup> Shain, 1994, p.830

<sup>26</sup> Smith, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Primaries are 'pre-elections' in the United States; in the context of the primaries, the candidates of a political party for the elections are nominated directly by the people.

claims.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, if an ethnic group represents a large proportion of the population in a congressional district, no matter how small that community otherwise is, their vote will be important for the Congressman. In the case of campaign financing, the crucial factor is that “individuals from outside the congressional district may make contributions for races in which they are not themselves eligible to vote.”<sup>29</sup> With their contributions, interest groups are able to find politicians who will stand for their interests. However, votes and money are insufficient for gaining real influence; an organized body is needed which ensures the unity of the ethnic community, forms alliances with other societal groups, and monitors policy making and implementation.

By organizational unity Smith means first the capacity to create cohesion, tackle rival conceptions or personal rivalries, and ensure ideological consensus within the organization. Second, a “political agenda must be established, allies sought, and actual political pressure brought to bear”.<sup>30</sup> The political agenda defined by the ethnic group can vary from human rights and democratic government abroad (typical of African, Irish, Cuban, Armenian and East European diasporas), economic development and foreign aid (typical of virtually all ethnic groups), and security issues such as NATO enlargement or the balance of power of a region. If an ethnic group works together with other interest groups (ethnic groups, churches, or business organizations) that have similar profile and goals, obviously it will be much easier to gain influence on American legislation. Smith suggests that it is crucial to reach the American public opinion, so having good ties with the media is an essential condition for successful lobbying. Finally, closely monitoring and/or defining policymaking processes is a crucial element of a successful lobby organization, which implies that lobby groups have to establish close contacts with decisionmakers. Although the President is the most powerful actor in American decisionmaking, one has to bear in mind that the possibilities of directly influencing the President are quite limited. Therefore, and for the already mentioned democratic nature

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, 2000, p.99

<sup>29</sup> Smith, 2000, p.101

<sup>30</sup> Smith, 2000, p.116



of the American political party and election system, it is more beneficial to concentrate one's efforts on the Congress.<sup>31</sup>

Another approach to the possible success of ethnic groups was elaborated by Patrick J. Haney and Walt Vanderbush<sup>32</sup> based on a synthesis of the literature on ethnic lobbies. Haney and Vanderbush mention *organizational strength* in the first place on the list of the characteristics of powerful ethnic groups. Organizational strength includes "organizational unity, a professional lobbying apparatus that provides useful information, and financial resources". *Membership unity, placement, and voter participation* are important, based on the group's electoral capacities; if an ethnic group disposes a large, like-minded, politically active membership who are ready to vote in a bloc, they are more likely to convince the American decisionmaker to favor their goals. Haney and Vanderbush add that the members of the ethnic group need to be assimilated into the American society while at the same time they have to have intensive ties to their homeland. Moreover, "the *salience and resonance of the message* a group promotes is important", which means targeting to win the sympathy of the greater public. To convince the public of their efforts is easier and more probable if the ethnic group promotes "oppositionless issues", that is, "issues around which there is little disagreement about the policy goals but significant disagreement about the choice of means to the goal"<sup>33</sup>. *Pushing on an open door* is another important, yet probably obvious condition of effective lobbying, which means promoting goals that are already on the government's political agenda. In my opinion, this idea can be linked to what Haney and Vanderbush refer to as the salience and resonance of the message; if an interest group aims to achieve goals which coincide with American values and are supported by public opinion, it can be interpreted as pushing on an open door as well. Another essential element listed by the two authors is the *permeability of and access to the government*. Here, the role of Congress is stressed once again, because it is "more porous than the executive". Last but not least, the

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<sup>31</sup> Smith, 2000, p.109-129

<sup>32</sup> Haney, P. J. and Vanderbrush, W., 1999. The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation. *International Studies Quarterly*, (1999) 43, 341-361. pp.344-345

<sup>33</sup> Watanabe, 1984, cited by Haney and Vanderbush, 1999, p.345

argument of a *mutually* supportive relationship is listed by Haney and Vanderbush. They refer to Watanabe, who claims that not only interest groups need policymakers, but policymakers need interest groups as well. Since interest groups provide information, votes and campaign contributions<sup>34</sup> in return for the politician's efforts, the two parties can establish a "symbiotic relationship"<sup>35</sup>. Watanabe goes so far as to say that in particular cases, a politician may even aggressively "encourage ethnic groups' activism in order to receive valuable support and resources".

In the next section we will challenge these criteria with the help of a case study on the HHRF's lobbying success.

### HHRF

The Committee for Human Rights in Rumania was founded (CHRR, later their activities were expanded to all Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin, hence the new name Hungarian Human Rights Foundation) in 1976 by some enthusiastic, young Hungarians in the United States; some of them were refugees from Transylvania, some were raised in the States, some were recent emigrants from Hungary, and only two of them were already involved in the business of organizing the Hungarian-American community.<sup>36</sup> The HHRF has been working as a private, independent and non-profit organization ever since its foundation. As László Hámos, founder and president of the HHRF claimed in one of his speeches, the goal of the HHRF was (and still is) to ensure a "human, free, and democratic life for the Hungarian minorities, the right to use their mother tongue and to maintain and improve their cultural, religious, educational, informational organizations".<sup>37</sup> Hámos defined the notion of human rights as

<sup>34</sup> Watanabe's argument coincides mostly with Smith's.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Hámos, L., 1995. *Hungarian-Americans and Hungary: Current Perspectives*. Lecture at Columbia University, University Seminar on Post-Communist States, Societies and Economies October 27 1995. [transcript of the lecture]

<sup>37</sup> Hámos, L., 1989. *A nyugati magyarság felelőssége: Eredmények és feladatok*. [online], [Transcript, Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem Akadémiai Napok] Available at: <http://www.itt-ott.org/archives/10/6618/document.pdf> [Accessed: 24 March 2013]

one of the most important tools to achieve their goals, mostly because human rights “fit well” into American political culture.<sup>38</sup> In the Cold War era, the main tools used by the HHRF to call the attention of the American public to the oppression and persecution of Hungarian communities were demonstrations; newspaper advertisements; backing domestic protest movements (in Romania); lobbying for the suspension of Romania’s MFN status; and taking part in CSCE<sup>39</sup> meetings.

After 1989, new opportunities emerged to strengthen or expand their lobbying tools, and therefore the activities of HHRF changed in many respects. HHRF’s current activities are mostly dependent on the actual hot issues of Hungarian communities that are linked to human rights. Just like before 1989, HHRF still regularly attends domestic and international human rights conferences and meetings. Occasionally, HHRF conducts fundraising efforts to assist cultural and educational institutions to serve their aim of identity preservation and cultivation. Moreover, they launched a Visitor’s Program, in the frame of which prominent minority leaders or spokesmen could address American decisionmakers (even the President) with the concerns and needs of their communities. Also, HHRF regularly collects, translates, analyzes and disseminates reliable studies and reports on the human rights conditions of minority communities abroad, and besides, the HHRF website hosts the homepages of ethnic Hungarian organizations and newspapers.<sup>40</sup>

### **Case study: The role of the HHRF’s in the suspension of Romania’s MFN status**

This section examines the case study of the lobbying efforts of HHRF for the human rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania, which finally culminated in the suspension of Romania’s Most Favored Nation trading status in 1987. Ceausescu’s Romania was one of the favored states in the Eastern European communist bloc by the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

<sup>40</sup> HHRF website

United States, since Ceausescu represented a maverick communist leadership and gained a certain level of independence from the Soviet Union. Romania did not participate in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, nor did it break off its relations with Israel in 1967 when other communist countries did, and finally, Romania permitted liberal emigration quotas for Jews.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, America rewarded the country with special attention and trade agreements, among which the Most Favored Nation status was the most generous one. Most Favored Nation status was accorded to Romania in 1975, which allowed the country to pay the lowest duty charged for products, that is, low tariffs and high import quotas.

However, the MFN status was linked to the human rights policies of the recipient country with the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which “affect[ed] U.S. trade relations with communist or former communist countries that restrict freedom of emigration and other human rights. It was a response to the Soviet Union’s “diploma taxes” levied on Jews attempting to emigrate. However, the President was given the authority to grant a yearly waiver to the provisions of Jackson-Vanik if he determines that maintaining the waiver (that is, the MFN status) would contribute to the accomplishment of the goal of the restriction”.<sup>42</sup> According to Ludanyi, the Hungarian-American human rights activists, who were becoming involved in the 1970’s-1980’s, they “utilized [the president’s] annual review as the means to focus attention on Rumanian human rights violations”.<sup>43</sup> László Hámos made it clear in his interview that it was Bulcsú Veress, one of the core founding members of HHRF, who realized this opportunity hidden in the 1974 Trade Act.<sup>44</sup> The first time the HHRF (at that time CHRR) tried to challenge the renewal of Romania’s MFN status was 1976; although the HHRF convinced 78 Congressmen not to support the extension of Romania’s MFN status

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<sup>41</sup> Moffett, G. D., 1987. Measure in Congress would pressure Romania on human rights. Critics of Bucharest want to suspend its preferred trading status. *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] 20 May 1987 Available at: <<http://www.csmonitor.com/1987/0520/arom.html>> [Accessed: 15 May 2013]

<sup>42</sup> Jackson-Vanik Amendment, 1974

<sup>43</sup> Ludanyi, A. 1990. Hungarian Lobbying Efforts for the Human Rights of Minorities in Rumania: The CHRR/HHRF as a Case Study. *Hungarian Studies* 6/1 (1990).

<sup>44</sup> Hámos, L., 2013. *Discussion on HHRF’s lobbying activity in the 1970s-1980s*. [interview] (Personal communication, 2 April, 2013; record retained for reference)

“until concrete measures have been taken to ameliorate the situation of minorities in that country”, they did not succeed in suspending the MFN status.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, this first trial brought together the core group of the most enthusiastic, young, fluent-in-English, second generation Hungarian-Americans, who were familiar with American politics, and were ready to act.<sup>46</sup> In the same year, CHRR organized a demonstration in front of the Romanian UN-mission, which was followed by other demonstrations in the following years. Moreover, advertisements were regularly published in the *New York Times* reporting the repressive nature of Ceausescu’s regime.<sup>47</sup> As it turns out from Ludanyi’s analysis, the HHRF realized that demonstrations are only of secondary importance to achieve their objective, because “they are supplemental to psychologically mobilize the committed support (...) and to draw media attention to the problem”<sup>48</sup>, and thus the HHRF began to concentrate its activities on decisionmakers. This meant the consistent presentation of oral testimonies as well as written statements both in the Senate and the House of Representatives on hearings about Romania’s MFN status from 1976 until 1987. As Ludanyi claims, although the annual renewal of Romania’s MFN status became almost a habitual action of the executive, HHRF did not give up and consistently lobbied both Houses. Moreover, HHRF targeted those Congressmen that were thought to be sympathetic to the issue of suspension of the MFN status. Ludanyi adds that during election years, HHRF launched letter-writing campaigns, phona-thons, and organized “meetings with delegations from their home constituencies. These tactics were particularly effective in campaigns which took place in Connecticut, New Jersey and Ohio, where the size of the Hungarian-American constituency is above the 100,000 mark”.<sup>49</sup> Ed Koch’s (Congressman, Mayor of New York City 1977-1989) reminiscence of HHRF’s lobbying efforts confirms the organization’s commitment.

“On May 7, 1976, I opened *The New York Times* in my office on Capitol Hill and saw a full-page advertisement paid for by the

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<sup>45</sup> CHRR Announcement cited by Ludanyi, 1990, p.82

<sup>46</sup> Ludanyi, 1990, pp.80-81

<sup>47</sup> Hámos, 2013

<sup>48</sup> Ludanyi, 1990, p.83

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Committee for Human Rights in Romania. The ad recounted acts of repression by Nicolai Ceausescu, the Communist dictator of Romania. My interest was piqued, and I wrote a letter to the Committee asking for more information. Congress was scheduled to renew Romania's "Most Favored Nation" status which would allow it special trade benefits and was, as I recall, the only Communist country to be so favorably treated. The leaders of the human rights organization came to see me in Washington. (...) He explained that ethnic Hungarians living in Romania were not accorded full citizenship rights and were persecuted by the Romanian government. The most glaring example was in the field of education. (...) [T]he government was not providing that constitutional right to Hungarians, whereas any student, even if only one, requested education in Romanian, it was provided. There were other acts of discrimination, as well. The committee pointed out the Romanian government was vulnerable to pressure on human rights from the United States because the most favored nation status for Romania was then before the Congress for renewal. I agreed to help..."<sup>50</sup>

Two issues were of primary concern to me; first, whether HHRF was helped or trained by any other interest group in the first years, and second, who were those Congressmen who sympathized with the issue, for I was unable to find the answers to these two questions in the literature. László Hámos confirmed that their organization was set up completely on an ad-hoc basis, and neither in 1975 nor later did they turn to any interest group to model their organizational structure. As Hámos put it, the 1970s were the time when ethnic interest groups began to seek influence on American decisionmakers, so basically there were no real models to follow. He explained that all they could "learn" from were the radical demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the human rights movement of Afro-Americans, and the Carter administration's commitment to human rights. Therefore, they should be considered a grassroots organization which had to learn all by itself how lobbying works in real life.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> HHRF, 2007

<sup>51</sup> Hámos, 2013

Concerning the tactics of lobbying, focus was on the already mentioned demonstrations, letter writing campaigns and presentation of written statements. Hámos recalled that Ed Koch, (cited above) who was Hámos's representative in his congressional district at that time, was invited to the first demonstration of HHRF in 1976, and although Koch did not attend the demonstration, he read the advertisement of HHRF in the *New York Times* and started to support the idea of suspending Romania's MFN status on the basis of human rights violation. He even delivered a speech in which he called upon the Romanian government to react to the charges. Hámos also mentioned that the HHRF continuously sent letters to Congressmen in which they called attention to the human rights violations of Ceausescu's regime. Analogously, each year, more and more Congressmen signed the letter of HHRF in order to support the suspension of Romania's MFN status. Another tool to convince Congressmen about the need to suspend Romania's MFN status was the letter writing campaign. Since Hungarian-Americans live rather dispersedly in the USA, you can find Hungarian-Americans in virtually every congressional district. Therefore, all Congressmen regularly received letters on the topic, signed by their voters of Hungarian ancestry. Therefore, as Hámos put it, the dispersion of Hungarian-Americans in this case meant an advantage.<sup>52</sup>

However, the political atmosphere did not favor the objectives of HHRF at all, since Ceausescu's Romania was the favored state of the U.S. from the Eastern European bloc. Moreover, the minority situation of Hungarians in Transylvania was completely unfamiliar to the American public. Furthermore, economic interest groups, as well as the State Department were definitely against the suspension of Romania's MFN status and saw the possible suspension as a threat to their interests. Besides, religious organizations did not stand for the goal either; although religious freedom was evidently not ensured in Romania, that these organizations cooperated with the Romanian authorities and campaigned for the maintenance of the MFN status in Congress, Hámos claimed. The only interest group that more or less shared the aims of HHRF was the Center for Russian and East European Jewry led by Jacob Birnbaum; this organization fought for

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

the protection of Jewish emigrants. Although their original aim was only to guarantee the free emigration of Jews, later on an agreement was reached between the two organizations, according to which they mutually supported each other's aims. In the interview, Hámos also referred to certain persons from President Carter's administration with whom HHRF had developed good relations, as well as human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Freedom House, and Helsinki Watch.<sup>53</sup>

An interesting feature of HHRF's lobbying efforts was the case of Republican Senator Jesse Helms, who picked up the story already in the first years. He proposed to back the initiative of HHRF and guaranteed the signature of 9 senators for the HHRF letters in the Congress. He wanted, in return, to incorporate the issue of the Hungarian minority in Romania in his political program. Hámos and his companions, although Helms' proposal was very attractive, decided not to agree on this condition, because they insisted on keeping the issue beyond political parties. Despite the refusal, Helms still supported the initiative later on, and in 1987, at the time of the suspension of the MFN status, he backed the suspension during the congressional debate.

Finally, the decision on Romania's MFN status in 1987 was associated with Congressman Frank Wolf, who drafted the amendment that made it possible to suspend the favorable commercial conditions of the country. Wolf seemed to be concerned about human rights, especially religious freedom in Romania, therefore he was a potential decisionmaker to be lobbied by HHRF. Hámos confirmed that Wolf was one of the first Congressmen who they approached with their intention to suspend Romania's MFN status on the grounds of Ceausescu's repressive human rights policies. Hámos also implied that HHRF had a certain role in Wolf's decision to travel to Romania (see below). However, Hámos emphasized that those were Wolf's like-minded colleagues, Chris Smith and Tony Hall, who were even more conscious about the issue and more receptive of HHRF's agenda, and, according to Hámos, their role was even more important than Wolf's in the developments of the case.<sup>54</sup> Still, the spokesperson for the suspension of Romania's MFN status was Frank Wolf.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



Certainly, besides the efforts of HHRF, other features contributed to the suspension of Romania's MFN status as well. During the 1980's, human rights violations and the antidemocratic features of Ceausescu's regime slowly became evident for the international community. Ludanyi notes that Károly Király's revelations of 1978, the resignation of U.S. Ambassador Funderburk to Romania in 1985, and the publication of Ion Mihai Pacepa's *Red Horizons*<sup>55</sup> in 1987 all contributed to the international realization of the repressive nature of Ceausescu's regime.<sup>56</sup> In the United States, three – already mentioned – Congressmen, Frank Wolf, Chris Smith and Tony Hall, who were deeply committed to human rights and religious freedom, decided to personally look into the alarming reports on Romania. They travelled to Romania in 1985; during their journey, they visited government officials, churches, as well as Christian communities which had to practice their religion secretly. Moreover, they met some Hungarians as well, and they learnt about the repression of national minorities in the country. Wolf mentions Géza Pálfi, a Roman Catholic priest, as an example, who was arrested and beaten because he declared in one of his speeches that Christmas Day should be a holiday, not a labor day. As Wolf reports in his book, the experiences of that journey made them work for the suspension of the MFN status of the country back in the U.S.,<sup>57</sup> which was realized only in 1987 by the adoption of the Wolf Amendment. Frank Wolf describes in his book his and his colleagues' efforts to let other American politicians know the truth about Romanian human rights policy and the real face of Ceausescu's regime. As he recalls, it was not an easy task at all. "The business community was instantly up in arms, and the Reagan administration came out against us, as did the State Department and leaders of both parties of Congress. And we were right about the attitude of certain members and senators who had traveled to Romania, where they had attended receptions and were treated very well; they received a false impression that everything was going swimmingly in Romania. (...)

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<sup>55</sup> Ion Mihai Pacepa, a Romanian political exile in the U.S., revealed the methods of Ceausescu's intelligence service in *Red Horizons*.

<sup>56</sup> Ludanyi, 1990, p.84

<sup>57</sup> Wolf, F. 2011. *Prisoner of Conscience: One Man's Crusade for Global Human and Religious Rights*. Zondervan pp.29-38.

We had a long, hard fight to pass out bill.”<sup>58</sup> The amendment aimed “to suspend Most-Favored-Nation status for Romania, and to provide for a review every six months of such status. Following the review, the President may reinstate Romania’s MFN status if he determines and certifies to Congress that Romania has made significant progress in granting freedom to emigrate and other political and religious freedoms”.<sup>59</sup>

The difficulties of Wolf and his companions to get the Wolf Amendment through was described by a contemporary report as well. Critics of the Wolf amendment claimed that, “by restricting Romanian exports and thus further weakening the country’s already depressed economy, the US would only be hurting the very people it is trying to help”.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, both American importers and exporters would be hurt with the suspension of the preferential trade agreement. Opposition to the Wolf Amendment was expressed by those who thought that “there’s been more emigration to the US - considerably more - than there would have been without MFN,” as well. The dilemma was expressed by an expert on Romania as follows: “If you don’t take [MFN] away people think you’re bluffing; if you do take it away, you’ve shot the only bullet in your gun”.<sup>61</sup> Obviously, the issue of Romania’s MFN status belonged to the larger context of the Cold War, and therefore it carried an important message to the Soviet Union. As noted earlier, the provisions of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment focused on emigration policies, and thus, human rights in general were only implied in the bill. Therefore, whether to extend the provisions to “human rights” in general was another dilemma, especially because it could have a disincentive effect both in Romania and in the Soviet Union concerning the amelioration of their emigration policies. “We know we can’t filter out other [human rights] considerations, but we need to make it clear [to the Soviets] that as soon as they meet emigration quotas we won’t change the ground rules”, Moffett cites an official. All in all, as Moffett concludes, Romania “has become a perennial test of the United States human

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<sup>58</sup> Wolf, 2011, pp.39-40

<sup>59</sup> Wolf Amendment, 1987

<sup>60</sup> Moffett, 1987

<sup>61</sup> Cited by Moffett, 1987

rights policy”, that is, whether ‘Realpolitik’ can overwrite democratic principles.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, democratic principles conquered economic interests in 1987 with the adoption of the Wolf Amendment. Wolf implies in his book that the turning point was his meeting with President Reagan; at that point the President realized that human rights conditions were much worse in Romania than in the Soviet Union<sup>63</sup>, although MFN status had been given as a reward for Romania for its relative independence from the Soviet Union. So, Reagan proposed the suspension of Romania’s MFN status, which was later approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

As we can see, many factors contributed to the success of HHRF in achieving the suspension of Romania’s MFN status. Although the efforts of the Hungarian-American organization cannot be questioned, the changes in the perception and judgment of the Ceausescu regime made it easier to convince the American politicians of their responsibility in influencing human rights conditions in a country awarded with preferential commercial status. Moreover, the role of Frank Wolf, who acted as the spokesperson in the whole issue, cannot be disregarded either. László Hámos told me in the interview that the HHRF intentionally wanted to remain almost invisible in the story, and this is the reason why Frank Wolf does not say a word about the organization’s potential role in turning his attention to Romania<sup>64</sup>. (Neither does he name other organizations he worked with on his journey to Romania; he only mentions churches and the Christian Solidarity International.) In their report in 1987, HHRF declared that the efforts of Hungarian-American organizations and the actions of Hungarian-Americans who took part in the letter-writing campaigns and phonatons contributed greatly to the success<sup>65</sup>. It would have been worth looking into the written statements or the letters written by the HHRF to Congressmen, but unfortunately, primary sources of the HHRF lobby between 1976 and 1987 are not processed and archived, therefore many aspects of the issue still wait for future researchers.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wolf, 2011, p41

<sup>64</sup> Hámos, 2013

<sup>65</sup> HHRF, 1987

If we examine this case study with the help of the existing literature on ethnic lobbies, we can draw very interesting conclusions. The criteria set by political scientists are the following: financial resources (campaign financing); organizational body articulating clear demands, mobilizing their constituents and building alliances with other groups; organizational strength; membership unity, placement, and voter participation; salience and resonance of the message; pushing on an open door; oppositionless issues; permeability of and access to the government; mutually supportive relationship between the ethnic group and the decisionmaker. The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation was an organization formed by a group of young Hungarian-American, who were driven by enthusiasm and commitment to their kin-minorities rather than by political interest. Their organizational structure was not clearly defined in the years discussed in the thesis, so we can state that the criterion of *organizational strength* was not really appropriate for the HHRF. The possible *financial resources* of the HHRF could not possibly be attractive for American politicians either. The ability to *mobilize its constituencies* and to *build alliances* with other interest groups seems to be partly valid for the HHRF, since they were successful in mobilizing Hungarian-Americans for the letter-writing campaigns, and they could work together with the Center for Russian and East European Jewry. The same can be said about the criterion of *membership unity, placement, and voter participation*; although Hungarian-American organizations are divided, the human rights conditions of minority Hungarian communities was an issue that was important for all Hungarian-Americans, regardless of their political heritage, therefore it could mobilize the whole community.<sup>66</sup> Again, voter participation possibly has counted, since Hungarian-Americans live dispersedly in the United States, their voice may matter for many representatives. I believe that the criterion of *salience and resonance of the message* was complete, because the HHRF's argumentation based on human rights fitted well into the American public and political discourse as well. However, since the HHRF had to face a very strong opposition in their case, neither the condition of *pushing on an open door*, nor the promotion of *oppositionless issues* was

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<sup>66</sup> Hámos, 2013

true for the HHRF lobby activity. The criterion of *permeability of and access to the government* is evident, but it is due to the system of the American polity rather than to the skillfulness of an interest group. Finally, no *mutually supportive relationship between the ethnic group and the decisionmaker* was established, therefore I would say that this criterion was not realized either.

As a conclusion we can say that the case study of the success of the HHRF further reinforces the hypothesis, namely that the existing literature on the criteria of ethnic lobby success is not exhaustive enough; many other factors influence the outcome of a lobby, while some expectations may become irrelevant depending on the actual situation. In the case of the HHRF we saw that the gradual change in the judgment of Ceausescu's regime and the role of Congressman Frank Wolf and his colleagues as spokesmen of the issue were of crucial importance besides the tough lobbying activity of HHRF to achieve the suspension of Romania's MFN status. The case study reveals precisely that the success of an ethnic lobby is rather unpredictable; we might even say that it is almost accidental, and the criteria set by political scientists should be considered only as starting points, not as the key factors to success.

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