


**Political (Electoral) Activity of Poles in Romanian
Bukovina (in The Light of Field Research)**


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Abstract:

The article presents the results of field research conducted among Poles inhabiting Bukovina in autumn 2016. The main goal and subject of the research conducted by means of an In-Depth Interview (IDI) was the political activity (especially electoral activity) and political views of local Poles. The article analyzes closely such issues as: (a) the degree of interest in politics; (b) support for particular political parties; (c) motivation behind support for particular parties; (d) activities of Poles in local government elections; (e) ways of choosing local leaders; (f) comparison of political activities shown by Poles and Romanians; (g) the role of a Polish member of parliament in Bucharest; (h) political activities of Poles outside the Association of Poles. The article presents synthetic conclusions from the conducted research and quotes selected fragments of respondents' statements.

Keywords: Poles, Bukovina, Romania, politics, elections, political activity

Introduction

Within the field research conducted in the community of Poles inhabiting Bukovina twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with people who might be considered leaders of the Polish minority in Romania. The interviewees included: a member of the Romanian parliament, members of local council (two of councilors are postmen, one is the owner of a company), a teacher, a school headmaster, clergymen, an employee of the Association of Poles, a head of the Polish House. The research was conducted by means of the in-depth interview (IDI) in

September 2016 in the following locations: Suceava (Suczawa), Pleșa (Plesza), Solonețu Nou (Nowy Sołonec), Cacica (Kaczyka), Păltinoasa (Paltynosa), Poiana Micului (Pojana Mikuli) (towns and villages with significant percentage of Polish nationality inhabitants).

The main goal and subject of the conducted research was the political activity (especially electoral activity) and political views of local Poles. During the interviews we tried to obtain answers to the following questions:

- (a) To what extent are Poles interested in the political life of the region and the country? What issues interest them in particular? Why is it so?
- (b) What political parties enjoy special support of Poles (left or right parties)? Do their representatives solicit for the votes of Poles?
- (c) What are the motivations behind the Poles' choices: do they vote as in the family and community? (*socio-structural paradigm*); or do they vote – in their opinion – to maximize the benefits, and thus everyone votes according to their individual motivation (*rational choice paradigm*)
- (d) What is the activity of Poles in local government elections? Are they interested in standing for the local council? Who is interested in standing in the election, who feels the calling to represent the local community?
- (e) What and what features in local circumstances predestine someone to assume the role of a local leader? What features are necessary in order to be an authority and to gain the trust of local Poles?
- (f) Do Poles participate in elections more or less frequently than Romanians and members of other national minorities? Which elections are the most popular (self-government, parliamentary, presidential)? Has there been any changes concerning the above issues over the past 30 years? Is passive and active political participation lower, higher, or on the same level?
- (g) Does the representative of the Polish minority, having practically a secured place in the parliament, have to solicit for votes? Or is it obvious that Poles will vote for a Pole? Why do people who are not Poles and are not in any way related to Polish issues vote in parliamentary elections for Gerwazy Longher?
- (h) Do Poles take up political activities in local and nationwide level outside the Association of Poles? What drives them? Are they successful?

This article thus attempts to summarize and analyze the information obtained in in-depth interviews on the political (electoral) activity of Poles inhabiting Romanian Bukovina.

The concept of political activity

Political activity is the key concept for our field research and further analyses. We understand it as “human behavior consisting in formulating and accomplishing political goals, related to roles played by individuals or groups within the political system” (Chodubski 1999: 25). Andrzej Chodubski claims that political activity as conscious behavior in the sphere of politics “is gradable in social reception, from very low to very high”. He lists five grades: “1) slight interest of an individual or a group in political life (sphere of privacy); 2) limiting oneself to exerting basic political duties (rights), for example participation in election; 3) membership in socio-political organizations, for example in political parties or interest groups; 4) social performance of leader roles in political organizations; 5) professional political career” (Chodubski 1999: 26). More on forms and dimensions of political activity deliberates Krystyna Skarżyńska (2002: 26-57).

Political activity of national minority members

Depending on various factors determining their political behavior national minorities participate in the political life of a country or its particular region in a different way. The scale and type of political involvement may depend on such factors as:

- (a) the population of the ethnic (national) minority and the degree of its territorial concentration (percentage of the country population or the population of a selected region; generally we can assume that the higher the percentage, the bigger the political activity);
- (b) the ethnic politics and the legal system of a country inhabited by the national/ethnic minority, especially concerning its formal and legal status (recognized versus unrecognized minority), creating institutional frameworks for the development of social and cultural life of a minority, and finally the election law allowing (or disallowing) effective political participation (division into electoral districts, preferences for national/ethnic minorities, etc.);
- (c) the degree of organization of a given minority, including the existence of properly educated elites who express the interests of a given community outside, and inside – effectively integrating its members;

- (d) homogeneity of the socio-political representation (towards the authorities of the state in which they live) and not revealing the conflicts within the group to the outside world;
- (e) the way in which other national and ethnic minorities function, especially those with comparable demographic potential (the effect of competition) – their involvement in the development of the political and socio-cultural life;
- (f) relations with other ethnic minorities (cooperation, hostility, indifference);
- (g) financial, organizational and political support from the “foreign homeland” (the national state of a particular minority) aimed at strengthening the dispersions which may be potentially used as an instrument in foreign policy (as an element of pressure on the government of a given state, or – more positively – as an important partner in the process of accomplishing public/civic diplomacy tasks);
- (h) formal or informal pressure from international organizations and NGOs.

In multi-ethnic states, where at least one ethnic (national) minority accounts for relatively high percentage of the population, the so-called ethnic parties are often established. Here we can observe the translation of one of the socio-political divisions onto the structure of a party system. An ethnic party should be perceived as “a party which openly presents itself to the voters as the best representative of the interests of one or a few ethnic groups, while the representation and the accomplishment of these interests is achieved with the exclusion of other groups and constitutes a key element in the political party mobilization strategy” (Kasprowicz 2014: 84). Martyna Wasiuta (2017: 4). notices that an ethnic party is characterized by “ethnic (regional) criteria membership structure and leadership, the electorate and the type of appeal, from which specific functions that it performs towards the ethnic group and its surroundings stem. These parties rely on socio-political center-peripherals schisms”. Referring to Donald Horowitz, Wasiuta claims that “an ethnic party is a political organization located between the political party and the interest group” (Wasiuta 2017: 4). She also notices that “the features according to which ethnic parties are classified include: the size of support received in the election by the party from a particular ethnic group on which the party relies and whether the party presents itself as a representative of this group. As such, an ethnic party would not be ethnic if it did not receive the majority support from a particular ethnic group and if it did not define itself in such categories (especially in the name of the party), excluding thus other segments of the electorate” (Wasiuta 2017). An example

of a Polish ethnic party is Poles Election Action in Lithuania, operating since 1994 (Leśniewska 2016: 73-85).

An ethnic party makes a particular ethnic (national) minority a fully-fledged and autonomous political actor. In some countries of Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic parties co-created governments in certain periods of time (vide: Slovakia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria) (Woźnica 2016: 187-198) thus having real influence on national policy and sometimes – on foreign policy as well. In a situation when a given ethnic (national) minority is not large enough to establish an ethnic party operating nationally or regionally, an alternative is to create local structures – electoral committees focused on local or regional elections. Another option is to establish political parties uniting various national and ethnic minorities in order to present their common interests to the government and ensure their accomplishment. An example here can be Political Movement Coexistentia–Wspólnota–Együttélés–Spivžitja–Soužití–Zusammenleben (in short: Coexistentia–Soužití–Wspólnota–Együttélés; COEX). It is a political group operating among national minorities of Czechoslovakia and then The Czech Republic, whose aim is to ensure the rights of national and ethnic minorities in the Czech state. As a political movement it has been operating since 1993, its history dates back to 1989. Representatives of ethnic (national) minorities may also conclude agreements with leaders of nationwide parties in order to enable their candidates to stand in the election using the party’s list.

The last option is to establish institutions whose primary goal is social and cultural activity and integration of the ethnic (national) minority community, which also performs the functions of political representation and is treated as such by regional and central authorities. An example of such an institution is the Association of Poles in Romania. It is “a federation organization, association local organizations – Associations of Poles. There are 15 of them at present (Bucharest, Constanta, Craiova, Iasi, Suceava, Siret, Ruda, Radowce, Nowy Sołonec, Kaczyka, Plesza, Pojana Mikuli, Paltinoasa, Gura Humorului, Moara)” (*Association of Poles in Romania*). The Association has been a member of the National Minorities Council since its establishment in 1993. The Council is “a consultation organ of the government, without legal entity, coordinated by the Department of Inter-Ethnic Relations, and its main goal is to maintain relations with national minority organizations. The Council supports the activities of national minority organizations which are represented in the Parliament, analyzes and presents to the Government, through the Department of Inter-Ethnic Relations, proposals of solutions

concerning the operations of national minority organization, teaching native languages, cultural and social life of minorities and reflecting the picture and the problems of minorities in mass media” (*Association of Poles in Romania*, more on non-party forms of political representation of ethnic /national/ representation minorities in: Ganowicz 2013: 21-39; Ganowicz 2016: 247-261; Pieńkowski 2015: 379-428; Kosiek 2015: 171-188).

Sławomir Łodziński points to four main strategies of political activity of ethnic (national) minorities. The first one is ethnic (national) organic work. It is characterized by the desire to maintain and develop culture through work and involvement of one’s own members; the evolution from the popularization of folklore towards achieving national and organizational maturity; relying on one’s own activity, not on support from the state. The second strategy is the civic treatment of the minority. It consists of focusing on the state while leaders of minority organizations emphasize the necessity of executing the rights of the minority, resulting from both the national and the international law. The third strategy emphasizes cooperation and “going outside”. It consists of including the minority in the social and political life of the region and the country inhabited by the minority. The recipients of these activities are not only the minorities but also representatives of the majority. And finally, the fourth strategy – “being minority in majority”, consists in maintaining one’s identity without provoking any negative associations in the majority society, enabling the minority to take advantage of all the rights of the majority (Łodziński 2005: 264 and next).

The conditions and circumstances of the field research

Before we move on to the discussion of the results of the conducted research, we need to point out significant conditions and circumstances in which the research was conducted.

Firstly, the interviews were conducted **three months before the parliamentary election**¹ in Romania, which took place on 11th December 2016 and in which, following a series of sensational corruption scandals in which major politicians of the ruling party took part, The

¹ Due to the strong role of the conflict-prone dual executive power (president versus prime minister), the role of the parliament, consisting of two chambers – House of Representatives and Senate in this system is somehow of secondary importance. It is not the law-making power, but a legislator. As a result, presidential elections are more popular than parliamentary elections, which is reflected in a great difference in attendance. At the same time – from the minority point of view, especially scarcely populated and dispersed, the election to the parliament is the most important one, giving them a chance to be represented on such a high level. Taking into account strong personalization and party dependency of the politics, it might be an effective method of gaining influence on decisions vital for the minority. More on various strategies of political activity in: Koźbiał (2014).

Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partidul Social Democrat) won, **and three months after the local government election**², held on 5th June 2016. Thus the survey was conducted in the “hot” post- and pre-election period, when public interest in political matters in the whole population is usually higher than in other periods.

Secondly, the research concerned **a very small group of Polish population inhabiting Bukovina**. According to various estimates, this community consists of 1.8-3 thousand people, dwelling in a few villages located a few or several kilometers from each other. **The Polish population, however, is highly organized**, which is manifested by: (a) universal membership in the Association of Poles in Romania as an official representative of the Polish minority in contacts with the Romanian and Polish authorities; (b) active participation in church life – in current religious practices, but also in socio-cultural ceremonies held by the parishes;; (c) a developed network of Polish Houses, which are material signs of the community life of the Polish national minority, standing out very clearly in the local social landscape and being the object of envy of other minorities inhabiting Bukovina, but also of the Romanians; (d) maintaining regular contacts with Poland in form of summer holidays for children, tours of folklore groups, visits of official state delegations, also on the government level, etc. Thus, compared with other national and ethnic minorities, Poles, though they do not constitute a large minority, as far as the institutional dimension of their social activity is concerned, stand out.

(...) well, as I told you before, these Polish Houses, which are, which are open to everyone, thanks to this open policy, thanks to information, the Association of Poles informs a lot in Romania, it informs everyone, thanks to this policy where we inform, all the time the Romanian society, we are doing what we are doing, we are even considered to be the strongest minority living in Romania, here in this area, right? (5)

² Territorial self-government – introduced in Romania in the Act of 1991 – has a two-level structure. There are 2951 communes, 41 districts (and the capital city of Bucharest). Elections for communal and district councils, as well as for the mayor or president of the district, are universal and direct. The clear administrative division has never been accompanied by a clear division of competencies between central and local authorities. Central authorities are unwilling to share their income (budgets, especially communal budgets, are based most of all on procedurally complicated transfers from central budget), which accounts for the fact that the scope of the self-government powers is very limited. There have been disputes in this field, not only internal, but also – even before accession to the EU – with the European Commission. In spite of reforms, the role of the self-government is limited mostly by the tightness of their own income, whereas the quality of local government is still unsatisfactory and receives the lowest evaluations in Europe (see [EQI](#)). More on the history of local government in Romania in: Burakowski (2014). For development problems see Bondar (2014), for comparative presentation in the Central and Eastern Europe region see Czyż (2011).

Thirdly, **the political aspect of the activities of the Association of Poles in Romania** has a local dimension through participation in territorial self-government organs, especially in the places where Poles account for a significant percentage of inhabitants. Poles live in villages located in ten communes (see the table below), of key significance are the communes of: (a) Cacica (Cacica, Solonețu Nou); (b) Mănăstirea Humorului (Pleșa, Poiana Micului).

Table 1. The population of Poles in Bukovina according to the national census from 2011

Town	Commune	Village	Total population	Poles	% of Population
Suceava			92121	111	0.12
Rădăuți			23822	35	0.15
Gura Humorului			13667	34	0.25
Siret			7976	55	0.69
	Cacica	Solonețu Nou	3712	744	20.0
	Moara		4384	142	3.24
	Mușenița		1871	76	4.1
	Păltinoasa		4909	56	1.14
	Scheia		9577	13	0.14
	Mănăstirea Humorului	Pleșa; Poiana Mikuli	3233	624	19.3
			Total Poles	1890	

The above reflects the villages where 10 or more Poles live.

Source: own elaboration on the basis of *Comunicat de presă privind...*

Moreover, the political activity of the Polish representatives is of parliamentary nature. “The Polish minority since the moment of reactivating the Association of Poles in Romania has been represented by three members of parliament. The first one was elected in the election district of Prahova, the others represented the Suceava district, where the office of the association was moved and located in the regained premises of the Polish House” (Rajczyk 2010: 148). Since 2002 Gerwazy Longher has been the representative of the Polish minority in the Romanian parliament. Polish members of parliament, along with 18 other members, comprise the parliamentary club of ethnic minorities. As the results of the parliamentary election show, not only Poles vote for Gerwazy Longher, he also gains a significant number of votes (though relatively small in the whole district) in the districts where, according to the census, the

Polish population is negligible or there are no Poles. It is difficult to explain such results with the votes of the people who do not declare to be Poles in the census, but due to the fact they have Polish ancestors, they reveal some kind of sentiment in voting. Similar situation happened in the case of support for the representatives of German minority in Romania, associated with Forumul Democrat al Germanilor din România (Demokratisches Forum der Deutschen in Rumänien) (Kozbial 2014: 37-52).

In the local election in 2016 the Association of Poles in Romania put forward its candidates for councillors in the commune of Kaczyka (17 candidates) and the commune of Mănăstirea Humorului (5 candidates). In each communes the Association managed to win one post of a councillor (Tadeusz Revai in Cacica and Józef Iriszek in Mănăstirea Humorului). However, only 296 votes in total were given for Polish councillors, which may show that an overwhelming majority of Poles in local election (contrary to parliament election!) are not guided by the ethnic origin of a candidate and vote for Romanian candidates. (Birou Electoral Central). Due to this fact, the Association of Poles did not attempt to put forward a candidate for the head/mayor of any commune.

Research results

The responses of our respondents allow us to make a few important theses which, although they need appropriate clarification, determine important directions for further research aimed at understanding the causes and conditions determining political attitudes of Poles living in Bukovina.

Firstly, we can observe **the withdrawal and passivity of the Polish community concerning the local government elections**. It would seem that “near is my shirt, but nearer is my skin”, whereas from the opinions of particular respondents it turns out that Poles in Bukovina either consider local government elections to be of lesser importance or largely do not think that the ethnic origin of the candidate is an important aspect to be considered. We might get an impression that in local government elections Poles lose to the Romanian majority by default and instead of fighting for another post of a councilor in the commune (potentially, taking into account the ethno-demographic data, it is possible to win another post) are satisfied with the symbolic representation, as if not realizing that in key issues for the commune every vote and every mandate of a councilor may be of key importance. From the conducted interviews it turns

out that local Poles prefer the strategy of beneficial accommodation to the current political situation in the commune rather than willingness to take part in political rivalry with undoubtedly stronger representatives of the Romanian majority. What is more, Poles inhabiting Bukovina generally eagerly support Romanian candidates, taking at face value their pre-election promises concerning, inter alia, improving the living standards of the Polish minority members, especially in such places as Pleșa, which is practically “cut off from the world”, as there is no beaten track joining it with the system of local roads (it is possible to reach the place only by the dirt road, which in winter or after heavy rainfall poses many difficulties). Respondents point at older people as most prone to manipulation by the Romanian candidates for councilors. On the other hand, from one statement we can infer that there are situations when the vote of a Polish councilor turns out to turn the scales (the last quote). It is generally believed that the commune authorities cannot do much in reality, contrary to district authorities and especially contrary to the members of parliament, chosen with votes of Poles (but not only them). Respondents were not willing to talk about local government elections or the activities of the commune authorities. To some extent this can be explained by their cautiousness as they had no idea what would happen with the collected material, but on the other hand we could notice their lack of interest in how commune authorities function, contrary to the opinions concerning the activities of senator Gheorghe Flutur or member of parliament Gerwazy Longher. An important topic in the respondents statements is the phenomenon of economic emigration of a large part of the Polish population, which can be attributed to the lower socio-economic activity of Poles in Bukovina, since emigration was very often chosen by the most energetic and entrepreneurial individuals.

Well, I don't know it, I was not interested. I am not into it so much. (1) / (...) well, such ambitious political interest cannot be found, I'm saying a man is busy to earn to buy some food, to earn some money, especially now, they are leaving, they are going out to the world and they can see in another country that people can live differently, an elegant house (...) buy a better car a so on, and politically, well, the elderly may read a newspaper and they do not always have reliable information and when the salary is increased by a few lei, they are satisfied and the party which increased pensions, and we know which one usually manipulates the elderly, is the best (11) / (...) this is so, that's why here locally, we can say, we don't have so much, we do not fight so fiercely, because we simply have what we want and we can do what we want even if we have one councilor less (...) (5) / (...) well

you know there are so many parties and there were so many parties and sometimes when one talked and talked so that I believed him that he would be good and nothing happened (6) / (...) now for these elections nobody was going because everybody knew that for that Polish House, because it is ours and we have to because it is ours, but from Mănăstirea Humorului they came many times, they visited our houses and called and there were meetings in church, they said something, they promised everything, the road, everybody promised that, the road would be built, would be built, would be built, and nobody knew, for example there were people who didn't know where Pleșa is (6) / (...) when we went we saw that there won't be more, three at most, there could be three, but five – no well there are many of them in this Mănăstirea Humorului, but well, if all voted, let's say if all Poles voted for those three, there was a chance that three would win, if more, then probably not. But they took one (here the surname is given) or another (surname) or some (surname), or I don't know which one and they promised: wait because you will be the member of parliament from this party or another party, or yet another party, and they took them on the lists, but people as always, well they thought that there would be something, but anyway, they weren't on the first or second place, they were on the third or fourth place, and these are such parties, such little parties, right (9) / (...) Rather not, well, listen to me, everybody likes talking politics, everybody asks what is happening, how it is, where, maybe this one is better, maybe this one is worse, well this kind of politics is everywhere, on the ditch, on the road, or elsewhere, but not really in fact (9) / (...) here as far as local matters are concerned, well, you just go directly, inhabitants go directly to the village head and talk with him, well sometimes if I see something, then I will say: Listen I don't like this, it shouldn't be so, it shouldn't be so, everybody goes to the village head and tells him what troubles them and that's how it works, either its Romanians or Poles, that is, there aren't any such, there isn't such a level, that you go to the councillor and then the councillor tells the council about it (9) / (...) all the time it is so, well if it was so, I know, maybe better, then people wouldn't be eager to come, and generally they say, why should I go when it is as it is, they do not care if there is a councillor, from Poles, no, they say what, for the village head we will not vote, and if this one leaves, there will be another and he will also be Romanian and that's how it ends, some people are really discouraged. (9)

Here, unfortunately, we do not have our councillor. No, and we had one, but it is interesting that he is usually in France, working (...) Nineteen votes, for me it is a big event, because he is more outside the village than in the village. (1) / (...) two because there is one in Cacica and simply many people went to work abroad (8) / (...) ha ha, yes. In the past election we could have even those three (2).

(...) Romanians had big influence here, they wanted to get there and you know, they came, they walked a lot and they came to Poles. Simply to Poles, yes, and they voted a lot. As there are many such, they usually go to older people, the people who do not understand what is going on (...) You know, and they went about and there were such who went from the cottage to the cottage. And you know, they convinced people in a manner, you know, if you choose me, there will be everything, well, politically you can see it, there are many, you know, many older people (2) / (...) they come from various parties and they come to our villages, to Poles and they say, I will have a great success so you will also take, well some money because you will be this, this, this and they lie to them and then they tell the family, well you will be with this and that is how it is divided (...) (6) / (...) and here not even Pleșa, in this moment there are few of them, but they are pushing hard to get there, they have their own politics, their methods for elections, so it is difficult to get there, in the past tenure we had two, as there was also Gienek. (...) now I am alone (...) rather Poles, but here it was also that they have their methods they try to break and if they break, they rule, well they have already broken something. (9) / (...) and recently there was a possibility, as there was one from Pleșa who was a candidate, but he was withdrawn, he didn't have much chance, but when they saw that there was one Pole, they concentrated there, almost everybody, well maybe not everybody, but 80 or 90% who voted so that the Pole would not rule (9)

(...) well here, on the local level I know, but somewhere, somewhere higher – I didn't hear about such a thing that someone from the Association would be the candidate on some lists for some more ambitious functions, but also for the head of the commune, In Solonețu Nou, for example there were two candidates, no, probably two, well they ruined everything for us because we didn't have, we don't have the second councillor, only one, the other one didn't have enough votes, because they were thrown for those guys, they were simply dispersed, obviously one is not a Pole, he was from outside, what I mean is that he is not of

Polish origin, but us, Poles, some of us, voted for him and these votes automatically and we lost because of this, right. There is something, but I also think that it is not bad will or to hit someone, but maybe more naivety (11)

(...) well there are thirteen councillors here and there six from one side and six from the other and I am the thirteenth one (13)

Secondly, respondents notice that **the natural platform constituting the representation of Poles in local government election or in parliamentary election is the Association of Poles in Romania “Polish House”**. Nearly all candidates in local government elections decide to stand for the election from the list of the Association of Poles. One of few exceptions discovered during the research was councilor Sylwester Aleksandrowicz, who was on the election list of the National Liberal Party (*nota bene* one of our respondents), though it is difficult to claim that his decision was detrimental to the interests of the Association. Polish candidates solicit Polish votes as a priority, though they also try to encourage Romanians and Ukrainians to vote for them. In two cases the occupation of the candidate (postman) helped him in the election.

(...) we always in the Association of Poles in Romania we have our friends in all districts, very many people, very many Poles are spread all over Romania, they are not listed, well they do not have to be listed on population census lists (...) (5) / (...), when you are active and people see that you can help them, they leave all the parties aside and they go to the Association of Poles in Romania (5) / (...) and people don't know much, for whom, for what, that it can be like this (2) / To have your own councillor there is not much interest in it, because we, as the Association of Poles, have only one councillor, and this is especially due to the fact that even Poles subscribe to the lists of other parties, and possibly there are councillors of Polish origin, but in another party (5) / (...) but that's because, I don't know, I don't know, maybe they do not want to vote for the Association, but there are Romanians, for example from Pârteștii, who vote for the Association, and Poles who are Poles, and so on, they do not vote for the Association, and so on (10) / (...) and in Solonețu Nou I had one hundred and five there, and here in Cacica forty six, and then in Pârteștii, but there are Romanians there, they gave me only ten votes, (...) and then there was this little village, there with Romanians, where I also delivered stuff, and they gave me nine, nine only, [so, if you summed up

those votes, one hundred and seventy five, or so, so Romanians also voted for you]there were Romanians (13)

Actually our statute says that if you stood in the election from another party's list, if you were on other lists, you cannot be the member of the Association of Poles in Romania, you cannot be the Association's candidate for any post if you go to another party, but you can be a regular member, there is no problem with this (5) / (...) [and don't they cause problems or complain that you are in this party?]no, [in Liberal National Party? Don't they complain?] who would complain? [the Association] no [they don't say anything?], no, no [they don't encourage you to start from their list?] no, well, no (12)

Thirdly, **the activity of the member of parliament representing the Polish national minority** is perceived as very important. The liberal election law in Romania clearly favors national and ethnic minorities, which, to some extent, reflects Romania's attempts to become the member of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Be that as it may, it is difficult to find another Central and Eastern European country where the candidate officially nominated by a national minority organization obtains 3 thousand votes and becomes a member of parliament. The MP seems to be the key figure in the political landscape of "Polish villages" in Bukovina. Most respondents emphasize that in the election he also wins support of Romanian citizens, who do not have Polish background and that this support from non-Poles is a consequence of his efforts and taking care of the well-being of all inhabitants of the region, regardless of their national/ethnic origin. Respondents pointed to a number of initiatives of MP Gerwazy Longher, which also served the Romanian and the Ukrainian communities (Since 2016 Victoria Longher – the wife of the President of the Association of Poles, Gerwazy Longher, has been an MP nominated by the Association of Poles). In the respondents' opinion, Gerwazy Longher stands out when compared with his predecessors [in 1990-1992 the first MP representing the Polish minority in the Romanian Parliament was Antoni Linzmeier. The next president for two tenures – Jan Piotr Babiasz (1994-2002) was at the same time the Polish minority MP]

Well, I think that with his help some projects were completed, there was his contribution. (1) / Well, as far as know, he helped renovate the school, the commune did that, that's a plus, that's a large plus. (1) / As far as I know, I don't know if there are other people apart from our MP, who would do this, right? (1) / (...) this is our MP,

right, we are glad to have him, we are really satisfied. (2) Yes, sure, and you know how? How he helps Romanians? Here, in our village, there is this Polish House, we have a room, right, we have everything, and when there is some meeting, he invites Romanians too, well, many Romanians from our village vote for him. (2) He walks, well he has those, there are chairmen from every village, with important, normal ones, but firstly, and then he walks in villages, hm. (2) (...), so far, you know, there was an agreement, because they are all his acquaintances and there is nobody that could become his competitor (2). / (...) thanks to our member of parliament, Gerwazy Longher, who helped us a lot, a lot, (...) and not only us (...) he renovated the school, because he also helps Romanians? And not only us, us and Romanians (3). / (...) this is the most important thing, he represents us, he defends us, he does everything for us, he cares for us, and this Ukrainian one, well not really, well (...) he just does his best (3) / (...) he was born here, so he knows heavy work, he worked like us, went to the forest, he knows them all (3) / (...), yes, yes, and Romanians vote for him, too. They often vote for him and why? Well, they know him and he helps them (...) mostly in school he helps them a lot (...) How? Here in Pârteștii, he gave so much money to renovate the school and there are no Poles there, are there any Poles there? No, there aren't any Poles there and he helped organize the money, yes, there were a few children, who, well I went there for some classes, I had Polish there (3) / (...) I just wanted to say that for this long time, for a few years, our kindergarten kids said that when they were asked who they wanted to be in the future, they would all say: member of parliament! (3) / (...), no, the campaign is in the whole country, all over Romania, where we have acquaintances we send leaflets or whatever we have, now it will look different in this election, but we always phone, we always have some people somewhere and these people know some other people who know more, this is like in Timișoara – everybody knows which ones are of Polish origin, because they either meet in church or, and everyone here has some friends or take some people, and ask do you have someone to vote for, there are many cases that people say I don't want to go to vote, there are no good candidates, it's all the same. And then our man tells them, come with me, help me here (5) / This is even shown in the results, for example in 2004 we had only 5500 (five thousand five hundred) votes, then it was a bit more, 7000 and something more, I guess, and in the last election

it was 8 thousand votes, right? Well, as I said, I never make any difference between people, it does not matter if a Romanian comes to deal with something, because he has a problem, I don't know, with transport in Poland, or it doesn't matter in what, we as the Association, help him. And people do not forget about it. There are very many various contacts, people, various businessmen, who cooperate with Polish companies or come to us if they have a problem or if it isn't a problem, they say, look what it is, we cooperate with a Polish company, well maybe someday there will be something, you might be able to help us, or here the whole network is being built, step by step and sometimes people get frustrate and say: I will go and vote for Gerwazy because there is nothing better here, a Romanian may say something like this. There are also many people, I know because I get phone calls, who go to vote, they come out and say, high Gerwazy, I was there, well, it is clear that they voted for you and this really motivates you that an ordinary Romanian comes and says: OK, look I helped you here, because I know you are doing a good job and you are OK (5) / (...) yes, this unity because if you are the president and say I am the president of the Association of Poles in Romania, everybody will just shrug their shoulders and when you go as an MP, then everyone will admire you and say – Oh, a member of parliament. In Romania it is perceived slightly differently (5) / (...) Well before Gerwazy there was some older man, but you know what, we didn't know him in the village and he didn't help us at all, we didn't even know that he could help us (6) / (...) we knew him at the beginning because he lived not very far, he is from Solonețu Nou, yes, and now we know him, because he always goes through Pleșa and he is a nice person, he stops and chats with older people, good morning what are you doing, he talks with everyone and people like him a lot here, well, first of all he did a lot for our village, there was an old school and people didn't have a place to meet, he built the Polish House, he fights with those roads, he always calls somewhere, we are glad because he helps (6) / (...) because you know what, for example in the area of Solonețu Nou everybody likes him (7) / (...) after 1989 there was a member of parliament and we have one there, who sometimes, well all the time he works for us and this can be noticed, this can be noticed. (9) / he drives around and meets Poles all over the country (8)

(...) well, because he makes no difference, when he does something, he doesn't differentiate between Poles and Romanians. For example I know that at the beginning Santa brought parcels only to those children who learned Polish and didn't give anything to others and now, when he is an MP, well he gives parcels to all, to Pertesti, where most inhabitants are Romanians, they are Orthodox ones, but he also gives parcels, and here in Cacica, when he organizes summer camps, he takes Polish and Romanian children, and so on, when he does something, he does it for everyone (10) / (...) because politicians from Poland come, marshals, ministers and so on, various delegations, and he is the figure that could represent with dignity our Polish community and now we have Gerwazy, who does a great job and he really knows these structures (11) / (...) I know him, he really cares for Polish matters and this is clearly seen, he is not a person who would be interested in his own business, I can see that he is active, that he is interested, he wants to do something, to leave some legacy (11) / (...) if Romanians didn't vote, well, I don't know, or friends or people supporting him, because he works not only for Poles, for the community, but generally and generally Romanians and other nationalities take advantage of it (11) / (...) that's why a member of parliament for us is something, it is very important, for sure (11) / (...) because there is this person who works, who works not only for Poles, but who also works for Romanians (...) well, he built those Polish Houses, Poles are in Solonețu Nou and in Pleșa, right, he built those Houses and for too, that's good, and he built the road, for Poiana Micului, so it is used now by Romanians and that's why they voted for him too (12) Ukrainians go with Gerwazy, right? Ukrainians also go with Gerwazy, yes Ukrainians [and why don't they go with their own candidate?] and what their candidate did for them? [so he doesn't do anything?] He didn't do anything, I didn't see him, I never saw him come to our village, right? (...) they go with Gerwazy, Gerwazy will do everything they need, they support him just as Poles do (12) / (...) such a nice and reasonable man (12) / (...) [and how was it with Babiasz? What MP was he?] well I only saw him once, in the village [And did he do a lot for Poles?], Well, no (12) / (...) why, well there, his village, Partestii and Cacica, there are a lot of Romanians and he did a lot there, he helped them, not us (14).

Fourthly, respondents **find the activities of district authorities very important**, especially the activity of the chairman of the Council of Suceava County in 2008-2012 and then senator elected from that county in 2012, Georghe Flutur. The senator enjoyed visible sympathy of local Poles, as from their responses we can see that he is favorably inclined to the interests of the Polish minority, he understands their needs and he is a trustworthy and reliable person.

The Governor (of the Province) did something. And he left something. And they go more for the person than for the party. (1) / You know, a greater councillor, in this province, for the whole province, also a lot depends on the man, on what kind of person he is. (2) / It's this party, this party, for themselves, and we really care who is in this province (2) / (...) and the higher too, who was in the province (2) / (...) was the senator, then a member of parliament, I think he was a senator until now, and now he is marshal of the province, his name is Flutur, he is from Gura Humorului, too, he was a forester (9) / (...) because he was a senator, the one who stood in the election, was the senator and wanted to be the marshal of the province, right, and he was respected by Poles. And most of us went to choose him, so that he could be the marshal, right (9) / (...) the province authority also helps, I know marshal office, here we call it Coniliur Judetiani (...) (10) / Flutur. That's him, he gave me such "utility", I don't know if I use the right word, this utility which opened the road to that village, well, politically, and not only this position, but when he wanted the second tenure, when the other one came from the party (...) and here he is again and he started work and he keeps his promises (12)

And fifthly, there is a clear **conviction that national minorities in Romania have common interests**, whereas the leading role in promoting minority rights is played by the Hungarians, the most populous minority (Nota bene they have their own party), and in the quality aspect – great significance is attributed to Klaus Werner Iohannis – the current president of Romania (since 2014), member of the German national minority, representative of the National Liberal Party. The promotion of the interests of the Polish national minority is therefore closely related to the concessions obtained by the Hungarians, which do not concern only them, but other minorities as well. On the other hand, the clear preference for Klaus Iohannis (instead of Victor Ponta from the Social Democratic Party) was not connected with his right political program, but with the conviction that a German at the post of the country president is a guarantee of order, rule of law and a fight with illegal connections in politics. In other words, the positive

stereotype of a German as a synonym of order and rule of law seems to be of essential significance.

There are about one and a half million Hungarians in Romania. Yes, yes. And they always win what they want, because there are so many of them, right. [And you get it in the package] And we get it in the package, right. Ha, ha. [OK, so they fight and you just follow them, simply?] Yes (1) / (...) we can say that Hungarians fight, there are many of them and they fight for their rights better and other minorities are almost on the same terms (...) and what they fight, what they win, is rather for all minorities (8) / (...) and now we wanted, we all wanted a change and therefore voted, I'm sorry for speaking Romanian, we voted for a German (...) Well, because everybody gets an impression that Germans are, that a German will manage differently, they are well organized, everything is organized differently, they are good managers, right. (...) We voted for this German because he is a good manager, well organized, well, I don't know (3). / (...) everybody, maybe not out of spite for Ponta, but probably everyone demanded some change. (2) / (...) they thought that maybe this will lead to some different mentality. (...) that is that will be different, he will not think like a Romanian, many people voted for him, he is Saxon, or German, or someone, so maybe he will think differently, maybe something (2) / (...) when there was no EU perspective, they agreed, as I said, these politicians, for such a formula of establishing the Parliament, they put it in the Constitution, it wasn't even changed in the Constitution, that every minority has the right to have its representative in the Parliament, yes, there were really evaluations, before joining the NATO, before accession to the European Union, evaluations on minorities, we always submitted reports, there were always interviews whether it is good or not good, whether someone presses us or not, there were such and there are still, on the Minority Charter, in Romania, so still the European Commission comes and checks these things, whether it functions well or not (5) / (...) so Poles voted for Iohannis, and why? Because he is not a Romanian, he is German, right, and what's the benefit of this? Well, maybe Germans will work differently, they have different mentality (10) / (...) for Iohannis (...) there were thefts when Ponta was in power, when he was prime minister, as they say, right, he would do everything to us, to the commune as they say (...) he visited us [Ponta] and promised, but fine words butter no parsnips, as they

say, they had money, this Gerwazy, Gerwazy had 26 billion and Ponta took this from us, he took the money (12) / (...), well, I don't know, I think it was a good idea to vote for a German (14).

Sixthly, a few respondents pointed at **the fact of the abuse of liberal and favorable to national minorities Romanian election law by registering the “pseudo-Polish” election list in Cluj-Napoca** (in central Transylvania, where there are only a few Poles). This was widely considered as an unfriendly move of the people who wanted to find their place in the Romanian politics by pretending to be representatives of the Polish national minority.

(...) we had, we had from Cluj-Napoca, there was one party. But they didn't manage, they didn't manage to get more votes, nobody even knew them. Who was it, but this name was, well it was so similar to the name of our Association, right (3) / In 2004 we had a very serious threat, a very serious threat for the Association of Poles in Romania, simply because one Romanian thought that by establishing the Association of Poles in Romania and the Cultural Association of Poles in Romania, they could just easily get to the parliament, that it would be so easy, right. Well we had some fights, there were small parties, which were established, they established the Cultural Association of Poles in Romania and they appeared as a minority and then there was a problem because if all members voted they would get to the parliament, without any problem. There were two Associations, not one and we Poles and there were Romanians. (...) And other nations, I remember that Croatians had this problem, Macedonians probably too (5) / It was very bad for us, for our Association of Poles in Romania, because in 2004 we couldn't remove this Association which was established in Cluj-Napoca, just because of one canny guy from that city and we would have more votes. And we had more votes and they lost. Then he was prosecuted, because almost all signatures were falsified. The act said that they had to have 20% of signatures of the population who declared that they are Polish, so they had to have here in Solonețu Nou, 20% of signatures, but they didn't have anything, nothing from Poiana Micului, nothing from Cacica, nothing from Pleșa, and 500 signatures from Cluj-Napoca. We sent it to the Prosecutor and they found out that there were so many signatures, that is there weren't people, they were falsified, this guy was even taken to court. He got some sentence (5) they established, there was such a possibility, a party similar to the Polish party, let's

say connected with Poland, and now it is impossible, because the legislation has changed, you must have at least five years of activity to take part in the election (8) / (...) well, he would have competition, he is seen recently, but these are competitors, it's not proper, I guess, because I don't know, some member of parliament, someone, wanted, within the Polish House, to stand in the election, from Transylvania, he wanted, but he wasn't Polish (9).

And finally, although **left-right division** has been rightly questioned in political science literature, if we assume that the The Social Democratic Party is the projection of a leftist party, whereas National Liberal Party is the rightist party, we can learn from our respondents that the older generation is inclined to cast their election votes for the left (which is supposed to guarantee that pensions will be paid regularly, especially in the situation where the ruling right party reduced pensions), whereas the younger generation favors the right parties more. Generally, the support for the right seems to be stronger, which is rather untypical for a national minority, usually oriented towards the left parties, as they call for protection of minority rights.

But it is simple here. I mean, the older go with the left, the younger with the right. (1) / In the left because they gave me pension, low, but they gave it and this is (1) (...) the youth support the right, because our province governor is from the right (...) and the governor did a lot for the province. (1) / Well, you know, like you, maybe more the right (2) / (...) here people are divided, but in my opinion the right is always in the first place (5) / (...) it depends on leaders, left or right, here in this area, in this local area, so it could be that someone from the right did some nice things for the Polish community (5) / (...) Once the government, the right one, but they took the pensions, they lowered them by 25%, well it was like that, from the whole administration, from the whole state budget sphere, people didn't forget it, and here we could see that people didn't vote for them, they went to vote for the left and the left had more votes (5) / (...) the right [why?] I don't know (12) / (...), well, right, I guess (13).

On the other hand, there were frequent voices claiming that all political options are worth nothing.

(...) this isn't in the whole country, not just here. In whole Romania there is such a mess that at all, you just don't know, for example the ideology, whether it is left or right. (1) /

(...) rather not, well, listen everybody talks politics, everybody is asking what is going on, how it is, where it is, maybe this one is better, and this one worse, well, such things, such, such, politics is everywhere, in the ditch, on the road, but generally not really (9)

Conclusions

Political activity of members of national and ethnic minorities is still perceived as a marginal issue in political science research on participation of parties and groups of interests in the political life of a country. This article made an attempt at presenting the political (especially electoral) activity of a relatively small group of Romanian citizens who declared Polish nationality, but a minority standing out from the Romanian ethnos and from other minority ethnos. The research findings, whose results are presented in this article are by no means an in-depth case study. In its assumption, the research is to contribute to further potential scientific explorations. From the conducted research we can see that the process of creating local political elites who receive the election support of the minority community is of particular interest. This aspect of research deserves a more in-depth analysis, not only through in-depth interviews, but also through the analysis of documents and press discourses.

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