

**Prof. Levente Salat**  
**Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania**

Levente Salat first states that his comments and assessment of the topic and of Professor Hughes' speech are influenced by his personal background referring to the topic, specifically by recent political developments in Romania.<sup>1</sup>

As a way of introduction, he states his agreement with Professor Hughes' assessment on the dominance of a certain focus in ethnic conflict studies. A particular scientific framing of the research in a field can 'discipline your way of thinking' which consequently leads to restricted and possibly wrong analyses. Such a prefixed framing leads to 'expectations that do not necessarily comply with empirical cases'. His general comments on Professor Hughes' argument can be summarised in three major points: First, Professor Salat states as one of its discernible merits the fact that he implicitly gives a typology of approaches in ethnic conflict studies. Having assessed and experienced many policies and political actions that are based on these approaches, he values the precision that Professor Hughes displays in pointing out the redundancy in the explanatory power of these scientific reflections. Together with the differentiation of the suggested failures of these reflections or approaches, Professor Hughes presents the said typology of approaches in ethnic conflict studies.

Second, he also agrees with Professor Hughes on the overarching shortcomings of these approaches in giving reasons for ethnic conflicts. They only enumerate explanatory factors regarding a violent escalation of conflicts, but do not give any indication on causal or triggering factors. By way of illustration, Professor Salat also refers to the monograph of Donald L. Horowitz<sup>2</sup>, who already stated in 1985 that there is 'too much knowledge of conflict and too little understanding'. Since then, in spite of the rapidly expanding body of literature there has been so little progress concerning this situation that this statement can still be considered valid. Furthermore, Professor Salat agrees with Professor Hughes that one way of addressing this shortcoming in research is a change in methodology, specifically a shift from the focus on aggregated statistical data towards case studies. One has to bear in mind that this suggested change in methodology also moves the entire discussion towards a broader methodological debate taking place in the Social Sciences, a debate that has primarily been initiated by Henry Brady and David Collier in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the third major point that Professor Salat wishes to emphasize is the fact that such a methodological shift from aggregated statistical data to single case studies also implies a shift from the macro to the micro level, which again can only be a beneficial development in this context.

Adding to this latter comment on Professor Hughes talk regarding the move from macro to micro level, Professor Salat draws a connection to recent developments in Romania, as well as referring to a statement

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<sup>1</sup> After the ousting of the government at the end of this April, the party that represents the Hungarian minority in Romania, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania, is no longer part of the coalition government for the first time since the last four electoral cycles.

<sup>2</sup> Horowitz, Donald L. (1985): *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press

<sup>3</sup> Brady, Henry E. and David Collier (eds.) (2004): *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

from David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild<sup>4</sup> about the expected findings of such a focus on single cases. He elaborates that according to Lake–Rothchild, it is most likely that such an individual focus will reveal a certain pattern: The main roots of the reasons of conflict lie in some form of ‘institutional arrangement that failed to deliver’. It is exactly this pattern that is well illustrated by the recent developments concerning the Hungarian minority in Romania (or rather, the developments concerning the respective political party, the UDMR, in the coalition government). Also, related to that aspect is the realisation about a highly important factor in *successful* co-operations or institutional arrangements between the majority and minority groups, namely the need to address the unequal power relations that exist between the two groups.

Aside from these three important and extensive comments on Professor Hughes’s lecture, Professor Salat continues by remarking on some smaller, but nevertheless important aspects of the argument in the lecture. First, he praises the fact that the issue of the relevance of ethno-linguistic fractionalization in ethnic conflict studies has been addressed. However, he disagrees with the speaker about the origin of this scientific strand; although it was first used in a Russian publication from 1964<sup>5</sup>, it is by no means a legacy from the Soviet times. It has been greatly developed and extended in academic circles since then to be classified as such an (unchanged) historic relict. Especially the correlation of ethno-linguistic fractionalization with other macro-social variables has attracted much attention, the fractionalization index proving a considerable capacity in predicting institutional efficiency, economic indicators or quality of government. Second, Professor Salat addresses the constructivist criticism of this ethno-linguistic approach. These critics argue that ethnicity only becomes relevant once it becomes articulated, communicated, once it gains importance as a concept by actively being invoked and developed by individuals – in other words, once it becomes constructed and defined in a certain way. However, this criticism ignores the importance that minorities themselves attach to ‘being counted’. The numerical assessment of a minority group (which again is mostly determined via the language) bears great value for minorities since it is a form of recognition. According to Professor Salat, minorities display a relatively high preoccupation with their numbers in general, i. e. the demographic development of the group, since it is their strength in numbers that correlates so strongly with their opportunity to be heard.

By way of conclusion, Professor Salat remarks on how the concept of ethnicity in general is employed in Professor Hughes’ argument. There is a tendency to apply this characteristic solely to the minority group, and according to Professor Salat one often forgets that the majority group in any given society has ethnic-linguistic features, too – but contrary to the minority, they are institutionalised. Politics that deal with ethnic issues concern two groups that both have their respective ethno-linguistic and religious identities. That must not be forgotten in designing and analysing these politics.

**ECMI Advisory Council Conference  
7 May 2012  
Berlin**

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<sup>4</sup> Lake, David A. and Donald Rothchild (eds.) (1998): *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict. Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Bruck, S. I. and V. S. Apachenko (eds.) (1964): *Atlas Narodov Mira*. Moscow: Glavnoe Upravlenie Geodezii i Kartografii.