

Ethnic rivals agree to truce

23.3.90 Pg 10

John Traynor and Susan Viets
in Budapest, and Chris
Stephen in Tirgu Mures

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23 March 1990

LEADERS of the feuding Romanian and ethnic Hungarian communities in this divided Transylvanian city yesterday agreed to moves to end the tensions which have caused three deaths and a wave of strikes.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Gelu Voican, headed compromise talks between the Hungarian Democratic Union (HDU) and the Vatra Romaneasca (Romanian Hearth) nationalist movement.

The Rompres news agency said the Hungarian minority had won a demand for its children and students to be educated exclusively in Hungarian.

A statement said Vatra Romaneasca accepted that the Hungarians, outnumbered four-to-one by Romanians in Transylvania, did not want to separate the northern province from Romania.

It said both sides called for an end to political strikes apparently called mainly by Hungarians in support of their demands.

Earlier yesterday, Budapest launched a verbal attack on the Romanian government, accusing it of behaviour reminiscent of Ceausescu, and warning of the danger of civil war in the region.

In reply to a Romanian government statement that Hungary was helping to foment the unrest in Transylvania, an angry Mr Horn said Bucharest was ignoring an agreement reached by both countries following the Romanian revolution. This guaranteed minority rights for the two million ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania.

In Tirgu Mures, about 2,000 Romanians massed at one end of the city's main square, cordoned off by a line of soldiers and two lines of tanks. They shouted support for their government and many said they were worried that Hungarians wanted too much.

One young man said the Hungarians had done well in previous years and had been helped by Romanians. "We feed a dog all this time and now it turns round and bites you," he complained.

Hungary's Minister of State, Imre Pozsgay, said that Romanian allegations of official Hungarian interference in Transylvania were a "forgery".

"The situation means that

Romania is not ready for freedom because freedom means that the minorities must also have their rights," said Mr Pozsgay.

He called on the Romanian authorities to act decisively to end the "lynching atmosphere and pogroms", claiming that the rightwing Romanian organisation, Vatra Romaneasca, which the Hungarians are convinced is behind the trouble, was employing tactics that recalled Ceausescu's Securitate and the inter-war fascist Iron Guard movement.

However, in the first statement since the Tuesday riots, the executive committee of Vatra Romaneasca said it is a cultural organisation and does not take part in political operations.

"Vatra Romaneasca regrets the way the events on the street developed. The Romanians were provoked by Magyar extremist elements," it said.

The statement blamed the main Romanian-based Hungarian political party, the Hungarian Democratic Union, for starting the trouble, by organising

an anti-Romanian demonstration on Tuesday. It is uncertain what role Vatra played in the recent disturbances but banners supporting the group were carried by Romanians.

Mr Horn said Budapest had tried for three days to discuss the crisis with Romania's President, Ion Iliescu, the Prime Minister, Petre Roman, and the Romanian foreign ministry, but without success.

Reports from Tirgu Mures said an ethnic Hungarian professor of microbiology was attacked by Romanians and had

to be taken to hospital. Reports added that Hungarians in the town were carrying black-ringed notes calling for "bloody chauvinists" and asking them to obtain Hungarian passports while they could.

In the Transylvanian town of Cluj, a Hungarian official said the city was quiet and tense. The Hungarian minority in the city was fearful of Romanian student demonstrations planned for next week, he said.

The Darkest Days, page 10