At the beginning of the 16th century Transylvania had been an officially Catholic land belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary and led by an elite consisting of three nations, the Hungarian nobles (increasingly referred to as the Hungarian nation), the Saxons and the Szeklers. However, the general population, deprived of any political power, consisted of Orthodox Romanians. In other words, in Transylvania the Latin West met the Byzantine Orient. The old Hungary fell apart between 1526 and 1541, its central regions taken by the Ottoman Empire, the west and the north by the Habsburgs, while the eastern part, Transylvania, became an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty. At the same time, various Protestant trends made their presence felt among the leading nations, eventually crystallizing in the form of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Unitarianism. During a three decade span (1540–1570) these rival denominations gained legal status and joined Catholicism as the official religions of the country. Catholicism became a marginal denomination, deprived of assets and of its hierarchy. Under Protestant pressure, the Orthodox Romanians were still kept away from power. The last three decades of the century underwent some attempts of Counterreformation and at a Catholic Reformation, at a time when the principality was once again led by a Catholic dynasty. In fact, this landscape became typical for the multicultural, multiethnic and multiconfessional character of Transylvania, a miniature Europe inhabited by Latin, Germanic, Finno-Ugrian, Slavic peoples etc., by Byzantines, Catholics and Protestants, by rightful citizens and “tolerated” inhabitants, by masters and servants, by privileged categories and by groups merely “allowed to exist”. The troubled events of those years have left us with a model of cohabitation based on both cooperation and rivalry that truly deserves consideration.

**Cuvinte-cheie**: români, valahi, unguri, sași, secui, Reformă, națiuni politice, stări, toleranță, discriminare

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