Preface to the Series

The present volume is a component of a series that, then completed, will constitute a comprehensive survey of the many aspects of East Central European society. These volumes deal with the peoples whose homelands lie between the Germans to the west, the Russians to the east and north, and the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas to the south. They constitute a civilization that is at once an integral part of Europe yet substantially different from the West. The area is characterized by rich variety in language, religion, and government. The study of this complex subject demands a multidisciplinary approach and, accordingly, our contributors represent several academic disciplines. They have been drawn from universities and other scholarly institutions in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and East Central Europe.

The author of the present volume, Sándor Biró (1907-1975), was a distinguished historian in Hungary. Because of the political atmosphere during the Kádár era, his manuscript was not considered by Hungarian publishers for publication, nor was the author offered the usual editorial advice for revising the manuscript. The work was eventually published in Switzerland under the title Kisebbstgben és öobböghen. Románok és magyarok 1867-1940 (Bern, 1989). When Professor Biró’s manuscript was considered for translation and publication in this series, it was decided by the Editor-in-Chief that the posthumous English language publication would follow the original text with minor corrections.

The Editor-in-Chief, of course takes full responsibility for ensuring the comprehensiveness, cohesion, internal balance, and scholarly quality of the series he has launched. I cheerfully accept this responsibility and do not intend this work to be a condemnation of the policies, attitudes, and activities of any of the persons involved. At the same time, because the contributors represent so many different disciplines, interpretations, and schools of thought, our policy, as in past and future volumes, is to present their contributions without modification.

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In examining this topic the author undertakes a task which, in the past, has led only to partial or one-sided attempts at solution. Yet the topic's significance goes well beyond Eastern European historiography. The issue had an indirect impact on Europe in general, along both military and political lines. I am referring, in particular, to the Southeastern European theater in World War I and World War II, and to the un inhibited exploitation of Romanian-Hungarian tension by the great powers. Had the relationship between these two nations been characterized by mutual understanding, had the great powers been unable to pit them against one another, then the events on the Southeastern theater of operations in the world wars would have taken a different course.

To be sure, Romanian-Hungarian relations leave a lot to be desired even nowadays (1975). Although both nations form part of a military alliance under the aegis of the same ideology, and have identical interests in a number of significant areas, the relations between the two are far from satisfactory. This relationship is deeply affected by the present condition and prospects of the approximately two million Hungarians living in Romania. The assessment of this situation and the prospects of the Hungarian ethnic group are the nodal points which reveal the tension in the relations between the two nations.

To the superficial observer, it may seem as if there were no special problems in this relationship. The official pronouncements reveal no sign of any kind of tension. The leaders of the two countries refer to the people of the other country as "fraternal people" and to the respective states as "fraternal Romania" or "fraternal Hungary." The treaty of mutual friendship and collaboration between the two countries was renewed not long ago. The Hungarian leaders have repeatedly asserted they fully recognize the territorial integrity of Romania, and have no territorial claims against that country. Hungarian historiography brands and condemns the manifestations of Hungarian nationalism, a topic on which a special monograph has been published in Hungary. The nationalist point of view has been deleted from the Hungarian educational system and from the textbooks. Hence, on the surface of it, everything is all right regarding Hungarian-Romanian relations.

However, concealed passions are boiling in Transylvania. Almost everyone in Hungary has friends or relatives living in Transylvania. They keep in touch, they visit one another often. On such occasions
they become eyewitnesses to and direct observers of what the Hungarians of Transylvania are undergoing. Only rarely, after considerable effort and at the cost of overcoming immense obstacles is it possible for Hungarians living under Romanian rule to obtain a passport. Often they become victims of painful discrimination in favor of Romanians when seeking employment or promotion and when seeking admittance to a university. The administration has found special devices to squeeze the Hungarians out of the cities of Transylvania and to replace them with large masses of Romanians brought in from other areas. Members of the Hungarian intelligentsia are deliberately transferred to purely Romanian areas — usually to the provinces of the Alba (Old Romania) — while Romanians who cannot even understand the Hungarian language are relocated to Hungarian areas. Specialized training is offered only in Romanian. By this process, and by the administration of examinations for admission, those young Hungarians who have not perfectly mastered the Romanian language are excluded from institutions of higher learning. They are prevented from improving themselves materially and socially. Newspapers and literary works from Hungary can be obtained only with the greatest difficulty. Such developments unavoidably remind the Hungarians of Romanian chauvinism in the period between the two world wars; yet, according to the Romanian interpretation, the above phenomena derive not from nationalism, but from a justified effort to compensate for the mistakes of the past.

Indeed, it is the past, particularly the recent past, the past 120 years, which gave rise to the greatest number of disagreements and contradictions among the representatives of the scientific and political communities of the two peoples. In these debates historical facts intermingle with prejudice, distortions, and unlikely assertions that have become second nature for a long time now. The basic explanation of this peculiar situation is to be sought in the circumstance that, for well-nigh fifty years, both sides have recoiled from confronting historical truth. Neither Hungarian nor Romanian public opinion is willing to acknowledge that part of history which is emotionally reprehensible to it. Of course, this state of mind has historical precedents as well.

The precedents go back to the mid-nineteenth century. In 1838, at the instigation of the ambassador of the Polish Prince Adam Czartoryski, the Romanian Principalities secretly formulated the political objective of the Greater Romania: the unification of all Romanians under one rule. Among those who signed the pertinent declaration was the Orthodox bishop of Buran, Cesario, who made the
Hungarian regions to the west of historical Transylvania, the so-called Arad, and Temes (Mureș-Turda) population, the majority varying from district to district. In the Partium, Central Transylvania was inhabited by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian majority in the counties nearest the historical evolution. Settlement by Romanians and Hungarians resulted in an intricately-subdivided and often ethnically-mixed situation. In certain areas there were numbers of villages where Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons intermingled. It was not unusual to find a purely Hungarian village next to a community half Romanian and half Hungarian, with a Saxon town nearby. The Romanians constituted the majority in the counties nearest the Regat in Southern Transylvania and in the North. To the East the border counties of Cic [Cluj] and Hăromneț (Trei Scaune) formed a Hungarian block along with the inhabitants of the counties of Uluârchi [Olturâ] and Maramureș (Mureș-Turas). The inhabitants of these counties are the Sălajans. Central Transylvania was inhabited by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian population, the majority varying from district to district. In the Hungarian regions to the west of historical Transylvania, the so-called Purizm, i.e. the counties of Maramureș (Maramureș), Bihar [Bihor], Arad, and Timiș (Timiș) the population was likewise mixed: Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbians, and Germans living side by side.

From that time to our day great power interests played a decisive role in the evolution of Romanian-Hungarian relations. The basic causes of the contradiction, the actual facts of the living conditions of the two peoples, became increasingly hazy behind the continuously-renewed conflict between Romanian and Hungarian leaders. Since 1867 the impact of propaganda only enhanced this haze both inside and outside the country. This development strikes us as unavoidable, given the complexity and contradictory nature of the social, economic, and cultural relations of the two peoples sharing the same area. Even those directly acquainted with the situation often tended to misjudge the true situation of the Romanians and Hungarians. The principal obstacle to a realistic appraisal of the situation derived from the geographical circumstances of the Hungarian and Romanian settlements and their historical evolution. Settlement by Romanians and Hungarians resulted in an intricately-subdivided and often ethnically-mixed situation. In certain areas there were numbers of villages where Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons intermingled. It was not unusual to find a purely Hungarian village next to a community half Romanian and half Hungarian, with a Saxon town nearby. The Romanians constituted the majority in the counties nearest the Regat in Southern Transylvania and in the North. To the East the border counties of Cic [Cluj] and Hăromneț (Trei Scaune) formed a Hungarian block along with the inhabitants of the counties of Uluârchi [Olturâ] and Maramureș (Mureș-Turas). The inhabitants of these counties are the Sălajans. Central Transylvania was inhabited by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian population, the majority varying from district to district. In the Hungarian regions to the west of historical Transylvania, the so-called Purizm, i.e. the counties of Maramureș (Maramureș), Bihar [Bihor], Arad, and Timiș (Timiș) the population was likewise mixed: Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbians, and Germans living side by side.

The Saxons, as the descendants of German settlers were called, constituted the majority in certain towns and regions of Brașov (Brașov), Făgăraș (Făgăraș), Bistrița (Bistrița) counties. In other areas, such as the Kis-Küküllő, the original settlement area of the Saxons, they were soon outnumbered by the dynamically proliferating Romanians. An accurate geographical survey of the settlement relations was not an easy task, even for the native analysts. In order to gain accurate information it was absolutely necessary to become acquainted with the languages of the three ethnic groups living there, as well as to acquire a thorough knowledge of the evolution which determined the prevailing situation. Under the given circumstances, the authors of articles and essays written for the sake of winning-over public opinion discussed these issues in oversimplified terms. Instead of writing of a mixed population, they referred to areas with a Romanian majority, to the need for Romanian autonomy, to guaranteeing the rights of the majority while keeping silent about the relative Hungarian majority at the time, the complexity and contradictory nature of the social, economic, and cultural relations of the two peoples sharing the same area. Even those directly acquainted with the situation often tended to misjudge the true situation of the Romanians and Hungarians. The principal obstacle to a realistic appraisal of the situation derived from the geographical circumstances of the Hungarian and Romanian settlements and their historical evolution. Settlement by Romanians and Hungarians resulted in an intricately-subdivided and often ethnically-mixed situation. In certain areas there were numbers of villages where Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons intermingled. It was not unusual to find a purely Hungarian village next to a community half Romanian and half Hungarian, with a Saxon town nearby. The Romanians constituted the majority in the counties nearest the Regat in Southern Transylvania and in the North. To the East the border counties of Cic [Cluj] and Hăromneț (Trei Scaune) formed a Hungarian block along with the inhabitants of the counties of Uluârchi [Olturâ] and Maramureș (Mureș-Turas). The inhabitants of these counties are the Sălajans. Central Transylvania was inhabited by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian population, the majority varying from district to district. In the Hungarian regions to the west of historical Transylvania, the so-called Purizm, i.e. the counties of Maramureș (Maramureș), Bihar [Bihor], Arad, and Timiș (Timiș) the population was likewise mixed: Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbians, and Germans living side by side.
al state in which every fourth inhabitant was a member of an ethnic group other than Romanian. The so-called Minority Agreement was formulated at the Paris Peace Conference for their protection. The Romanian regime in power at the time objected to this agreement, and opted to resign rather than sign it. The liberal cabinet led by Ion C. Brătianu had to be replaced by a new regime which accepted the treaty. This hesitation, however, was a bad omen regarding the future of the agreement.

Indeed, the Hungarian press of the following years resounded with protests against the oppressive Romanian policies on nationalities. The Romanian-Hungarian tension became sharper once again; politicians and associations repeatedly issued statements regarding the offenses committed against the Hungarians of Transylvania. The background of these polemics were attempts to revise the Treaty of Trianon, or to maintain it. Both sides, Hungarians and Romanians alike, sought the support of domestic and foreign public opinion. A real flood of articles, geographical and historical monographs written in diverse languages were published to prove the validity of the Hungarian or Romanian thesis. This time the two parties struggled from different bases, from inverted roles; before World War I the Romanian side attacked while the Hungarian side was on the defensive, but after Trianon it was the Romanian side that had to assume a defensive position in the face of Hungarian criticism of the Romanian nationalities policies. The struggle was determined from the start by the fact that the Hungarian objective was the revision of the Peace Treaty, while the Romanian objective was the maintenance of the status quo. The nature, sequence, reception, and effectiveness of the arguments were all a function of this factor. The Hungarian polemicists stressed the shortcomings of the Trianon Treaty, its injustices, its disregard of the Wilsonian principles, and historical evolution; all for the sake of revision. Those who represented the Romanian point of view argued in favor of the status quo on the grounds of the absolute majority of the Romanian population in Transylvania or the oppressive nature of Hungarian rule in the period of the Dual Monarchy, and referred to Romania's patient nationalities policy. They felt far more secure than the authors of the Hungarian polemics attacking them. The absolute majority of Romanians in Romania and in Transylvanian territory was an undeniable reality, and this majority could only grow as a result of the expulsion of 200,000 Hungarians and by other maneuvers to decrease the numbers of Hungarians. The Hungarian arguments brought up against the Treaty of Trianon had but little effect on Romania's former

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In the author's opinion, it is only by examining conditions according to these categories that light can be shed on the actual life of the nationality concerned, and that it becomes possible, both for Hungarians and Romanians, to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and to carry out serious soul searching. It is hardly possible to imagine a Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation, long overdue, on any other basis.

None of the previous studies in this field have even attempted such an approach. I.e. to present the living conditions of Romanians and Hungarians on the basis of sources from the two historical periods. Our approach determines the nature of the sources to be used. Clearly, the true conditions of Romanians and Hungarians can only be unravelled through those sources which depict them in their most favorable light.

In previous treatments of the subject the main sources have been laws and ordinances, official pronouncements, and historical events, as well as the often-contradicting statistical data. Neither laws nor ordinances can provide a true picture of living conditions since it is their manner of application and the activities of the executive agencies that carry the regulations into life. The author has relied, as his main primary source, on items in dailies and periodicals illustrating everyday life and comparing and contrasting these with the texts of the laws and ordinances; and also using occasional publications, pamphlets, popular calendars depicting the life of the people, etc. The picture that emerges from the sources listed above differs markedly from what the public of Hungary and Romania and the international public has been able to perceive.

What traits characterize the picture that emerges before the reader from the study of living conditions based on the categories above? The evolution of the relations of the five categories has not been straightforward during either one of the periods. This evolution depended on the nationalities policies of the prevailing regimes and on economic laws.

Both the Hungarian governments of the Dual Monarchy and the governments of Greater Romania considered and dealt with nationalities issues from a more or less nationalist point of view. But the extent of state interference in the case of the Romanians of the Dual Monarchy, and the Hungarians in the period of the Dual Monarchy, and the Hungarians in the period of Romanian rule from 1918 to 1940. The description of these living conditions based on authentic sources can only contribute to the evolution of a more objective perspective and to a more accurate information for the general public. It would provide both sides with an opportunity for self-examination and for a sincere acknowledgement of the sins of the past. By closing down the painful chapters of the past, the confrontation of these mistakes becomes a prerequisite for advancing, with purified souls, towards a fresh start in Romanian-Hungarian relations, based on better mutual understanding and mutual good will.

Budapest, January 1975

Dr. Sándor Biró