

## 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 Bíró (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 *Kisebbségben és többségben. Románok és magyarok 1867-1940* (Bern, 1989). When Professor Bíró'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.

B.K.K.

## Foreword

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 uninhibited 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 *Regat* (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 nationalist sentiment, 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 people. 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 Georg 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

participants swear that this programmatic declaration would remain strictly secret. In this period the Romanians of Hungary, Transylvania, and Bukovina were under Habsburg rule, those of Bessarabia under Russian rule, and those of Wallachia and Moldavia under Ottoman domination. Their unification aimed to overthrow the domination of the three neighboring great powers, an endeavor which, of course, the latter regarded as jeopardizing their interests. Hence the secrecy was warranted. Some of the Romanian leaders of the Transylvania also agreed with the aim of unification of all Romanians, although they never referred to the matter openly in that period.

In the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848-49 the Hungarians clashed with the Romanians who supported Austria. The Romanians sided with Austria because they could expect more from the latter than from the Hungarians. But they were disappointed in their expectations. It is true that Austria did not recognize the reunion of Transylvania with Hungary that had been voted into law in 1848; moreover, between 1861 and 1865, in order to put pressure on the Hungarians, Austria employed mainly Romanian officials in the counties of Transylvania. The majority of the extremely-mixed population of the Grand Principality of Transylvania, which continued to be ruled from Vienna, was already Romanian. But Austria, having reached a compromise with the Hungarians in 1867, recognized the laws of 1848; Transylvania once again became an integral part of Hungary and Romanians there came under Hungarian rule. From then on Romanian leaders regarded Hungary and the Hungarians as the greatest obstacle to their goal of a Greater Romania. They resorted to every possible means to overcome this obstacle. Influencing public opinion within and abroad came to be one of their most effective means. Thus the attack against the Dual Monarchy was launched. "We must compromise that regime," was the watchword of the newspaper of the Romanian ethnic group in Transylvania, the *Tribuna* of Nagyszeben [Sibiu] which engaged in a struggle against the Hungarian state and the Hungarians over a period of twenty years. The state, and Hungarian rule in general, were criticized and attacked in their papers, in their pamphlets, political and otherwise (for censorship was unknown in the period of the Dual Monarchy), orally and in writing, inside and outside the country. The regime was accused of barbaric repression, of compulsory Hungarianization, of perpetrating "Asiatic" administrative abuses, of impeding the civilization and culture of the Romanians. For a long time the Hungarians did not take this campaign seriously, and the Romanian side was able to gain a number of advantages.

Public opinion in Romania, and eventually in the Entente countries, increasingly sympathized with the Romanian arguments. A special agency, the famous Romanian League of Culture, was founded in Bucharest to mastermind this propaganda. The academic propaganda work was carried out by well-known Romanian scholars through works written in French and German. Those French and British scholars who, in the interest of the foreign policy of their country, were intent on weakening the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, allied as it was with Germany, soon sided with them. Thus the Hungarian-Romanian conflict became a function of the rivalry and struggle between the blocs of great powers and systems of military alliances.

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 Csík [Ciuc] and Háromszék [Trei Scaune] formed a Hungarian block along with the inhabitants of the counties of Udvarhely [Odorhei] and Maros-Torda [Mureş-Turda]. The inhabitants of these counties are the Székelys. 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 *Partium*, i.e. the counties of Máramaros [Maramureş], Bihar [Bihor], Arad, and Temes [Timiş] 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 Brassó [Braşov], Küküllő [Tîrnava], Beszterce [Bistriţa] counties. In other areas, such as the Királyföld, 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 of the Dual Monarchy, or about other nationalities in the area. To those who advocated irredentism, the simplest solution, of course, was to unite the areas "inhabited by Romanians" with the *Regat*. Since, however, the counties with a Hungarian majority were surrounded by areas with a Romanian majority, and the areas with a mixed population could not be sorted out on the basis of geography, union with Romania would have meant the absorption of more than one million Hungarians into an eventual Greater Romania. It was clear to those acquainted with the situation that, in the long run, this would lead to the oppression of the Hungarian and Saxon ethnic groups; even the demand for Romanian autonomy — according to the Romanian writer Ion Slavici — concealed this intention.

The attacks against the Hungarian state and the Hungarian leaders derived from a mixture of real offenses, of administrative abuses, and of distortion by deliberately overlooking certain facts. The Romanian regime had reason to be satisfied with the results obtained by these attacks. The assertion that Romanians were suffering oppression under Hungarian rule became generally accepted both within the country and abroad. It eventually turned into a slogan taken for granted and found a place even in serious historical studies down to the very present.

The centuries-old dream of the unification of all Romanians was realized through the Greater Romania created under the terms of the Trianon Peace Treaty of June 4, 1920. By the same token, however, almost two million Hungarians came under Romanian rule. The Saxons of Transylvania, the Russians of Bessarabia, and the Bulgarians of the Dobruđja suffered a similar fate. Thus, Romania became a multinational-

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, of 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 publications attacking them. The absolute majority of Romanians in Romania and on 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

and new allies (the Little Entente). The general diplomatic lineup that evolved after the war favored the Romanians. The leading role in the diplomacy of Central and Southern Europe was played by France who, if so happened, had likewise played a leading role in the formulation of the Treaty of Trianon. It was also French influence that dominated the League of Nations at Geneva. The Romanians could always count on the active support of French diplomacy. On the other hand, Hungary remained isolated because of its right-wing domestic policies, the scandal of the forged French francs, and other reasons. Albeit some circles in the United Kingdom, prompted by envy of French influence, did express certain critical opinions regarding the policies of the Little Entente as supported by France, official British foreign policy could not be expected to favor revisionist moves. Once Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, Hungary gradually joined the anti-western Axis powers, expecting support for its territorial claims from those quarters. Thus, once again, the Hungarian-Romanian conflict was allowed to sink to the level of a function of great-power rivalry. The Hungarian and Romanian authors who participated in the polemics naturally conformed to the position taken by their respective governments.

In the situation that prevails in 1975, the outcome of familiar factors, there can no longer be an open Hungarian-Romanian conflict. Nor is it the intention of the author of these lines to upset this beneficial (in many ways) armistice. Hence our work differs, in its objective, in its structure, and in its choice of sources, from the polemical writings mentioned above. Instead of stressing historical arguments and territorial claims, its objective is to reveal the living conditions of the Romanians under Hungarian rule in the period before 1918 and of the Hungarians under Romanian rule from 1918 to 1940. In their evolution and consequences these conditions offer many lessons bearing upon Hungarian-Romanian relations in the future. It is clear that the survival, prosperity, or destruction of every ethnic group living under foreign rule depends on conditions affecting different aspects of existence. What are the most important conditions for the survival of ethnic groups? In the opinion of the author these conditions may be grouped under the following five categories:

1. Existential conditions, i.e. economic factors.
2. Circumstances affecting the use of the language of the nationality.
3. Religious life.
4. Opportunities for preserving the culture of the nationality.
5. The conditions for validating human and citizens' rights.

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 unraveled 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-conflicting 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 in the life of the nationalities and the nature of the methods of intervention and their impact differed radically from that of the Hungarians under Romanian rule. The results of the process were also different. Under the Hungarian rule of the Dual Monarchy the Romanians grew stronger economically, socially, and in their national consciousness. In contrast, the majority of the Hungarians of Romania became impoverished; their economic, social, and cultural development

came to a halt. Their national consciousness, however, did become stronger and their literature began to blossom. Interestingly and encouragingly, during both periods well-intentioned understanding and even cooperation prevailed over the spirit of impatient nationalism. This explains the fact that the general picture, whether in relation to Hungarian or to Romanian rule, is not entirely negative. Under some of the categories living conditions became darker and more depressing, while they grew brighter under others. If the objective of the nationalities policy of the ruling circles in Hungary or Romania was to thwart the national consciousness of the Romanian or Hungarian ethnic groups who were regarded as the enemy, they failed to achieve this end during either one of the periods under consideration. It is true that some individuals did assimilate for the sake of advancement or as a result of administrative pressure, while others became indifferent or cosmopolitan. But the majority not only persisted in their nationality but became decidedly richer and more resilient, in their national consciousness. The official nationalities policy elicited dislike, often even hatred, towards those who dominated from either ethnic group. This feeling, while understandable, resulted in further unfortunate developments and poisoned the atmosphere between the two people. This is the most dangerous heritage of the nationalities policy of Hungarian rule in the Dual Monarchy period and of the Romanian rule from 1918 to 1940.

Only by means of a sincere confrontation with the past can the poisoned atmosphere be ventilated, can hatred be dissolved. This was the consideration which prompted the author of these lines to tackle the issue. We felt we would be serving the cause of understanding between the two people if we were to contribute to revealing those actual living conditions which best describe the Romanians of Transylvania in the period of the Dual Monarchy, and the Hungarians in the period of Romanian rule between 1918 and 1940. The description of these living conditions on the basis of authentic sources can only contribute to the evolution of a more objective perspective and to — 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.

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