

INTERWAR TRANSYLVANIA BETWEEN PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY AND STATE CENTRALISM

ТРАНСИЛВАНИЯ МЕЖДУ ВОЙНИТЕ – ОТ ТРАНСИЛВАНИЗЪМ КЪМ РУМЪНИЗАЦИЯ

Румъния достигнала апогея на териториалното си разширение през 1918 г. Присъединяването на новите провинции не означавало само добавяне на хора и територии, но и нов политически, културен и икономически манталитет. Бесарабия била провинция в рамките на княжество Молдова, която била присъединена от Русия през 1812 г. Буковина станала част от Хабсбургската империя през 1774 г., докато Трансилвания дълго време се намирала в границите на същата империя, а през 1867 г. била поставена под унгарско управление в Австро-Унгарската империя. В този контекст не било необичайно след Първата световна война някои административни разпоредения в Румъния да се оказват предизвикателство за някои от румънските политически лидери, макар и толкова различаващи се в разбиранията си.

Това изследване проследява различията в мненията на политически лидери от Трансилвания и от Старото кралство относно формата на организация на държавата. Ако първоначално идеята за автономията на Трансилвания примамвала няколко политици от тази област, включително и Юлиу Маниу, с течение на времето към тази цел останали да се стремят само етническите малцинства. В обобщение авторът акцентира върху причините, които накарали румънците в Трансилвания да се откажат от централноевропейската идея за автономия и трансилванизъм и да се обърнат към теорията за централизма, много по-близка до балканските разбираня.

Ключови думи: автономия, Трансилвания, централизъм, Старото кралство.

The unification documents of the three provinces – Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania – come to prove that the issue of keeping a certain degree of autonomy depended on how the centre – the Old Kingdom – was perceived, on the moment when this unification had been decided, and on the existence of political elite genuine to the region.

We can notice that the first unification declaration of 27th of March 1918 between the Moldavian Democratic Republic (Bessarabia) and Romania stated the maintenance of provincial autonomy, with a Country’s Council (Diet) and own administration. However, on 27th of November, the Council voted the cancellation of the unification clauses and dissolved itself.

The second province, Bukovina, which had been under the Austrian administration since 1774, requested the intervention of Romanian armies, due to the Ukrainian state's pressures of remaining a part of Austria in 1918. Once the order was reestablished, the "unconditional and permanent unification of Bucovina in its old borders to Ceremuş, Colacin and Nistru with the Romanian Kingdom" was decided.

The last province to unify with Romania was Transylvania, on 1st of December 1918. Not only was it the biggest of the unified regions but also the richest, with mature political elite formed in Budapest and Vienna schools and with experience in national fight (Hitchins 2000). A part of these aspects weighted a lot in Alba Iulia. The dispute on the text of the declaration, concerning the autonomy only emphasises this situation (Galea 1996: 93)¹. Finally, the autonomists would gain the fight and the declaration clearly mentioned that "The National Assembly ensures temporary autonomy for the above mentioned territories until the Constituent meeting elected through universal vote".

At the same time, the National Assembly created the Great National Council of 250 members, which appointed a Dirigent Council on 2nd of December, composed of 15 members. This "temporary government" of Transylvania had an extended influence, following Bucharest only in matters of external policy, military issues, railroads and other national jurisdiction domains. The solution of temporary autonomy was practically the compromise made between Iuliu Maniu, the undeniable leader of Transylvania and the group of those militating for an unconditional unification. Through these activities, Iuliu Maniu was promoting the idea of *transylvanism* in Great Romania's policy. For some of his opponents he was even a separatist.

On 2nd of April 1920, Averescu government dissolved the Dirigent Council and at least formally he ended the problem. Once the liberals came to power in 1922, the centralist tendencies amplified. Thus, the National Romanian Party of Transylvania became the most important opponent for Brătianu's party. The 1923 Constitution rejected by Maniu and his transylvanians stipulated that Romania was a "national unitary state"² and the country was divided into 72 districts. The enthusiasm of a national unity was far superior to the autonomous administration's wish and the problem of minorities that had been discussed in Paris was no longer in question. Not for chance, did Raoul Bossy mention in his memories that the Hungarians from interwar Transylvania used to say, and not ironically, that "God is big but Ionel Brătianu is even bigger" (Bossy 1993)³.

The real critical problem was the cleavage between provinces and yet the existence of a Transylvanian spirit that was being felt at Bucharest also, despite the National Liberal Party's domination on the political scene. The claim of a moral superiority of the Transylvanian elites, the nostalgia of Vienna and mostly the frustration of being the second in the capital's regional politics determined those close to Maniu to express publicly their discontent.

Although the National Romanian Party did not sympathize with Averescu's Government and did not stand the chance as regional party to come to power, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, an ex-prime-minister in 1919, declared in one of his discussions in June 1921 with the Catholic Archbishop Raymund Netzhammer: "Our unification with old Romania could never aim that we, from there, with our West-European culture become like those here: a pile of Bucharest dirt! You find yourself in dirt here, you are not even in the Balkans, you are in Asia!" (Netzhammer 2005: 1062). From this point of view, it was ironic that the Hungarian minorities in Transylvania had the same approach as the Romanian politicians in the same region.

Along with the Saxons, the Hungarians were sceptical about the "cultural offensive" that was taking place in Great Romania, especially regarding the nationalization of their schools (Livezeanu 1998: 212). Frequent were the cases when the reformed and unitarian churches were complaining that "many Hungarian parents are forced to send their children to the Romanian sections of the national schools". The authorities, of course, did not perceive the situation similarly. They were arguing that a part of the Romanians were *magyarised* during the Austro-Hungarian regime and those whose names indicated Romanian origins had to be brought back into the heart of the nation (Livezeanu 1998: 216). When the party ruled by Maniu – already transformed into the National Peasant Party by unification with the Peasant Party from the Old Kingdom in 1926, came to power in 1928 it was not so determined about autonomy anymore, neither about the complaints regarding the 1923 Constitution. None of the Romanian politicians from Transylvania would search for an administrative formula that was believed to endanger the state's integrity. Never did the National Party's and then the National-Peasant Party's members promote secessionist measures.

In the same context, we should remind that the national and the minorities' problems gained new meanings. The Hungarian propaganda in the West for revising the Trianon Treaty or the *optant's process*⁴ were issues that imposed firm positions in interwar Romania. Any hesitation would have been considered as undermining the state. Of course, it is hard to imagine Iuliu Maniu in such a situation however it was obvious that the perception of these issues was different in 1928 compared to 1920. As proof stands the Council of Ministers' the President himself fiercely denied in a speech during the first government the accusation that he would have betrayed the problem of minorities, but he admitted that it was one "extremely complicated" (Arhivele, fond Ministerul: Informații, dos. 120, f. 114). Meanwhile, Iuliu Maniu was asking rhetorically the Parliament's members: "Don't our minorities have full freedom of manifestation? Aren't they represented in numeric proportion in the country's Parliament?" Addressing to Hungarians and Saxons he was only emphasizing the idea, affirming that "Maybe we could complain for the way we have been treated (long applause) but they have nothing to complain about us, they that have full freedom to manifest" (Arhivele, fond Ministerul: Informații, dos. 120, f. 115–116).

In what the administrative law was concerned, Maniu reminded in *Testament moral politic* (Moral Political Testament) that after the Peasants' Party government the services were decentralized, "everybody was able to act in his own region and we gave autonomy to communes and districts, for each to be ruler in his commune or district. The Liberals changed it again. What happens? For each insignificant need or trouble we have to run to Bucharest" (Maniu 1991: 156). However it was obvious that at this time decentralization was preferred to autonomy, and the autonomy of Transylvania was of out the question.

With another occasion, celebrating the Great Union and giving a speech in his birthplace at Bădăcin, Iuliu Maniu gave the Hungarian politician Count Bethlen as example who "had not dared to ask for more than the autonomy of Ardeal, because they themselves found absurd the idea of unifying Ardeal and Banat with Hungary" (Arhivele, fond Ministerul: Presă externă, dos. 577, f. 6). Moreover, at the same time the autonomy itself seemed to Maniu "an idea so impossible that even the serious minds from the West would be surprised of their way of thinking". What would have appreciated the leader from Bădăcin was a great confederation of the Central European states, "keeping their sovereignty and their borders legally established" (Arhivele, fond Ministerul: Presă externă, dos. 577, f. 6).

This strong attitude was due to the enhancement of the European revisionist group, especially after Adolf Hitler won the elections in Germany and to the reinforcement of the nationalist Hungarian move with Gömbös government coming to power in 1932. Not for chance, on the occasion of a banquet organized by „Magyar Szemle” Society, Count Bethlen affirmed: "That program that would request the unification of Hungarians who live alongside the borders, without vote; that program that would ensure Slavs and Rutens the autonomy requested so that under international control they could decide where they belong to; that program that would claim a vote in Banat and in upper parts, since there is no dominating nationality; and finally, the autonomy in Ardeal with equal rights for all nationalities, becoming a buffer zone between the Hungarian and the Romanian race, that program, in my opinion, would correspond to Europe's interests, as I had and still have the courage to say this" (Arhivele, fond Președinția: Serviciul Special de Informații, dos. 29/1934, f. 7). Some days prior to this speech, the Hungarian prime-minister Gömbös repeated the same thing.

The political evolution in Romania and Central Europe at the same time would be contrary to Maniu's beliefs and also to Hungarians' in Transylvania. Once the authoritarian regime of Carol II was established, the influence Maniu once had was completely diminished, following the dissolution of the political parties. The foreign political isolation only helped the events in the summer of 1940, when Romania lost Bessarabia, the north of Bukovina and Hertza County to USSR, the north of Transylvania to Hungary and the south of Dobrudzha to Bulgaria. The Second Vienna Arbitrage on August 30th 1940 was only partially favourable to the Hungarians in

Transylvania. Their reaction and that of those from Hungary were not enthusiastic, knowing about the intervention of Germany and Italy, whereas Iuliu Maniu would have become the Romanian symbol of fight against that solution. The winner of that time was solely Hitler to whom it was not necessary to solve the problem of sharing Transylvania between Budapest and Bucharest. As long as the problem existed, the old enemies could have become allies.

NOTES

¹ For more details please see Groza 2003.

² For a discussion pointing this matter, see Philippi 1997: 36–49.

³ Even if Romanians from Transylvania had plenty of complaints we could not agree with Henri Prost who says that: “Transylvanians could only regret the excellent Hungarian administration” (Prost 2006: 63).

⁴ The Hungarians that were asked to choose between Hungary and Romania, after the Trianon Treaty.

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