

The System of Government Commissioners during the First World War and the organization of the Government High Commissioner's Office in Transylvania*

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Abstract: *The System of Government Commissioners during the First World War and the organization of the Government High Commissioner's Office in Transylvania.* The study presents the establishment and usage of the system of state commissioners during the First World War. Related to this topic it also presents the establishment of the institution of the regional commissioner's office for Transylvania and of the Government High Commissioner's Office for Eastern Hungary created in December 1918. The appointment of state commissioners and the organization of state commissioner's offices impaired local governments, and the research analyses how this process unfolded and how the transition to the circumstances that developed after the war took place.

Keywords: state commissioners, First World War, Transylvania, Government High Commissioner's Office of Eastern Hungary, parallel authorities in 1918, extraordinary situation

Rezumat: *Sistemul comisarilor guvernamentali în timpul Primului Război Mondial și organizarea Înalțului Comisariat Guvernamental în Transilvania.* Studiul prezintă înființarea și utilizarea sistemului comisarilor statului în timpul Primului Război Mondial, inclusiv înființarea instituției comisariatului regional pentru Transilvania și a Înalțului Comisariat Guvernamental pentru Ungaria de Est în decembrie 1918. Numirea comisarilor statului și organizarea acestei instituții a afectat sistemul administrației locale, iar cercetarea analizează evoluția procesului și modul în care s-a desfășurat tranziția înspre situația de după război.

Cuvinte-cheie: comisari guvernamentali, Primul Război Mondial, Transilvania, Înalțul Comisariat Guvernamental pentru Ungaria de Est, autorități paralele, situație excepțională

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The institution of State Commissioners has been used for centuries in Hungary, but the outbreak of the First World War brought about a completely new situation, requiring special measures, which also affected the civil service based on local autonomy. In the study hereby I present the establishment and usage of the system of state commissioners during the First World War, and the establishment of the institution of the regional commissioner's office for Transylvania and of the Government High Commissioner's Office for Eastern Hungary. In relation to this I analyze how the appointment of state commissioners impaired local governments, how this process unfolded and how it created a transition to the circumstances that developed after the war.

Extraordinary Situation and the System of Government Commissioners

The institution of the royal commissioners, respectively state/government commissioners roots back in Hungary to the Middle Ages, however the model, which was adopted all over Europe, originates from the Roman Empire. Initially it was the power of judging that was given over to commissioners, but later this was extended to various administrative and other tasks. Commissioners were appointed in extraordinary situations, e.g. natural calamities, plagues or task coordination for greater works of public interests. But the need to curb powers acting against the central power was also considered such extraordinary situation. Examples to this latter situation would be the liquidation of the county governments and the appointment of royal commissioners in the time of Joseph II, or the appointment of county administrators before the Revolution of 1848, since 1845, to ensure the strengthening of central power.

During the Revolution of 1848 the institution of first royal commissioners, then, since September 1848 of government commissioners was widely used. Among the many tasks the royal and government commissioners had to fulfil was occasionally strengthening the central power, observation of the organization of national movements, prevention of the danger of civil war, respectively restoration of public safety, tasks related to recruiting for the national army, providing weapons and supply for the army and other tasks. Since October 1848 the system of state commissioners was differentiated, various types were created. As far as the paper hereby is concerned we mention only the plenipotentiary national commissioners or government commissioners and the plenipotentiary municipal commissioners. The former had jurisdiction over several municipalities and they were primarily commissioned to organize the defense, but they had the power to act also in political and administrative matters; the latter – among

whom we find also lord lieutenants, deputy lord lieutenants and parliamentary representatives as well – had plenipotentiary powers within a single municipality. Even though the system of state commissioners suffered frequent and sudden changes, it is interesting that in the spring of 1848 – when the government hoped to consolidate the situation – Bertalan Szemere, the minister of the interior managed to gain authority also over the government commissioners and even though the system of state commissioners remained in place in the bordering counties; in the other municipalities in general the former commissioners were appointed as lord lieutenants.¹ A state/royal commissioner was appointed to execute the union with Transylvania both in 1848 and in 1867.²

Also in the Dualist Period state commissioners and rarely royal commissioners were appointed to execute special tasks or to handle situations created by natural calamities or plagues, but these appointments were meant for special situations and the government tried to reinstate the regular administration as quickly as possible. The system of state commissioners was used during the great government crisis at the beginning of the 20th century, when a “national resistance” was created against the Fejérváry government, considered illegitimate and the local governments of the counties refused to subordinate themselves to that government. Government commissioners were appointed to curb the resistance movement, but finally the ruler ordered new elections and in 1906 the former opposition came to power.

The system of state commissioners was used even more widely during World War I. Shortly after the outbreak of the war government commissioners were appointed based on §4 of Law no. LXIII of 1912 regarding special measures in case of warfare.³ The Law was created as a result of the tempestuous period at the beginning of the 20th century, when tensions between the great powers, the annexation or Bosnian crisis of 1908 and the Balkan wars projected the possibility of an eventual armed conflict. However the idea was raised earlier, as it is formulated in the motivation for the law: “It is a long felt need that in case of war or

¹ Róbert Hermann, “A kormánybiztosi rendszer 1848–49-ben” [The System of State Commissioners in 1848–49], *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 111 (1998), 1, pp. 28–78; Sebestyén Szócs, *A kormánybiztosi intézmény kialakulása 1848-ban* [The Establishment of the Government Commissioner Institution in 1848] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1972).

² See Judit Pál, *Unió vagy „unificáltatás”? Erdély uniója és a királyi biztos működése (1867–1872)* [Union or ‘Unification’ The Union of Transylvania and the Work of the Royal Commissioner (1867–1872)] (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2010).

³ Along with Law no. LXVIII of 1912 regulating army services.

imminence of war the government should have at its disposal a special force by which it would be able to enforce extraordinary measures.”⁴ The issue of regulation by law of the case of extraordinary situation was raised several times, first in 1848-49, later in 1868 and several times after; generally as an initiative of the Common Ministry of War.⁵ However this process was hindered by the “fear of the domination of the ‘common’ armed forces coming from Vienna”.⁶

At the beginning of the 20th century the issue was becoming more urgent also on the agenda of the government and during the rule of the so called coalition government several bills were created regarding this matter – one of them was drafted by the Common Ministry of War –,⁷ until finally in 1912 the bill passed (Law no. LXIII. of 1912 regarding the extraordinary measures in time of war). The Austrian model where the civil administration was transferable to the military commanders was rejected already in 1909 during a preliminary meeting organized by the Ministry of the Interior, since “the preparation of such a measure is impossible in our country for political and public law reasons”.⁸ The idea of the appointment of state commissioners was also rejected at the time, it was preferred that the

⁴ <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=91200063.TVI&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D46>, last accessed 14.08.2018, for the text of the law.

⁵ The issue was raised after the Russian–Turkish war of 1878, ten years later the bill was already signed even by the ruler, but it was still not advanced to the rank of a law, probably due to the disagreements between the Hungarian government and the Common Ministry of War. The latter considered the bill inappropriate to the scope and wanted to subordinate civil authorities to the army already at the beginning of mobilization, but the Hungarian government disagreed. The Common Ministry of War pushed in 1893 for another proposal, but this time another disagreement occurred between the minister of the interior, Géza Fejérváry and the minister of justice. The debate continued until 1900, and after several years of neglect the issue was raised again. Árpád Tóth, “A kivételes hatalomról szóló 1912. évi LXIII. tc. létrejöttének előzményei 1868-tól a századfordulóig” [The Precedents of Adoption of the Act LXIII/1912 on Exceptional Power from 1868 until the Turn of the Century], *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nomitae. Acta Juridica et Politica*, 11 (1964), 6, pp. 3-32.

⁶ Árpád Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom jogi szabályozása Magyarországon az első világháború előestéjén” [The Legal Regulation of Exceptional Power in Hungary on the Eve of the First World War], *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nomitae. Acta Juridica et Politica*, 50 (1996), 13, pp. (3-95) 3.

⁷ The Common Ministry of War sent in 1906 to the Hungarian government the collection of exceptional laws elaborated for Austria and requested that it would elaborate similar measures for Hungary as well. Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom,” p. 3.

⁸ Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom,” p. 4.

lord lieutenants would be given special power, although the elaborated bill permitted in principle the appointment of any other civilian as state commissioner. Finally another bill was presented to the ruler, one that was elaborated at the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, but that did not gain the approval of the Ministry of War. The proposal of the Ministry of War had several points that the Hungarian government(s) found disquieting, one of them was precisely related to state commissioners. Since it was undesirable for the Hungarian governments that the army should become too influential, it was decided upon already in 1909 and it was included later also in the law that only "Hungarian citizens established in Hungary" could be appointed.⁹

Finally the bill was passed during the rule of the Lukács-government, after several preliminary sessions held in October 1912. The detailed negotiations took place this time in the Ministry of the Defense and the secretary of state of that Ministry was presiding the meeting. This mere fact shows how much the position of the Hungarian government changed towards accepting a greater military influence (e.g. allowing the extension of military justice to civilians as well, contrary to their former opposition in this matter). Another sign of the increased influence of the army was the provision of the law stating that state commissioners "have to act in accordance with the plans of the military commanders". A new debate formed in relation to the jurisdiction of state commissioners, for memories of abuses in this matter during the Fejérváry government were still vivid. For example, a representative of the Ministry of Defense pushed that not only civilians, but also officers of the Gendarmerie could be appointed state commissioners, but that proposal was rejected.¹⁰ The bill was presented to the House of Representatives by the prime minister on November 30th, 1912 and it passed only with small changes due to the fact that the opposition absented from that session. The opposition parties challenged the bill in a manifesto, but that had no impact. One of the popular representatives of the opposition, Dezső Polónyi objected for example, among others, that the bill provided only for government commissioners that they "must act in accordance with the plans of the military commanders," but there were no provisions to encourage military commanders to act in consensus with civil authorities.¹¹

⁹ Tóth, "A kivételes hatalom," p. 4.

¹⁰ Tóth, "A kivételes hatalom," pp. 23-26.

¹¹ Ferenc Pollmann, "Tersztyánszky Károly lovassági tábornok 1915 szeptemberi felmentésének háttéréhez" [The Background of Cavalry General Tersztyánszky Károly's Dismissal in 1915], *Hadtörténeti Közlemények*, 110 (1997), 4, pp. (79-102) 83.

The arguments for the necessity of the bill made reference to the circumstances of modern warfare and emphasized especially that in war it was necessary that the army would be supported by civil authorities and civilians and at the same time it was important that law and order and public safety would be maintained. However constraint on civil population in an extraordinary situation was tempered by the principle that “the government can exercise extraordinary power only at the extend of the emergency,” i.e. “every time it can exercise its extraordinary power only at the extent absolutely necessary in that situation in regard to the circumstances at hand”;¹² respectively the effect of the law was strictly limited to the state of war or to extraordinary situations created by imminence of war;¹³ and it maintained the jurisdiction of the Parliament – even though with limitations.

Besides regulating many other issues, the bill¹⁴ gave power to the government to appoint state commissioners with jurisdictions on one or several municipalities for the execution of extraordinary measures. State commissioners were subordinated to the government and were sworn into office by the prime minister, but in case they were appointed to support the activity of a certain military commander they had to act “in accordance with the plans of the military commanders” (§4). The law provided that it was the government commissioners’ duty to maintain public order and safety and to promote the interest of the army according to the intentions of the military commanders and to harmonize the administrative measures needed for such a purpose, although the creators of the law considered at the time that “jurisdiction and lawful operation of the regular public administration of the municipalities and townships was normally not affected [...] by the appointment of a state commissioner”.¹⁵ Government commissioners had special powers such as disposing of the legal and state institutions in their region of operation if needed, including the military and border police. If these did not obey they could be suspended by the commissioner. Although one could hand in a complaint to the ministry

¹² Detailed motivation for §1.

<https://net.jogtar.hu/ezet-ev-torveny?docid=91200063.TVI&searchUrl=/ezet-ev-torveny%3Fpagemum%3D46>, last accessed 21.08.2018.

¹³ Detailed motivation for §3, *ibid.*

¹⁴ The other paragraphs of the bill give an itemized enumeration of the extraordinary measures that can be taken, such as limitation of the right to gather, of the freedom of the press, of the transportation of people and ware or raising prices to the maximum. The bill also had an effect on the judiciary.

¹⁵ Detailed motivation for §4, *ibid.*

of interior in order to prevent that. The same exceptional state made it possible for the ministry of interior – and in cases of emergency for the government commissioner – to prohibit establishment of certain associations, to order verification of some associations that had proved “suspicious,” respectively to approve people’s assemblies, demonstrations and to censor the press before issue. In extraordinary situations the minister of the interior could annul the resolutions of the local government bodies if these affected the interests of warfare, without the right for an appeal.¹⁶

Later the law was amended by several orders such as the one commissioning the government, respectively the government commissioners to order evacuation of the population in case of enemy attack. In these cases the commissioner had to provide also for the transportation of valuables. Elaboration of the measures started already after the bill passed, but it took until the outbreak of the war to finish. The collection of measures entitled “Bulletin of the extraordinary measures in case of warfare” was passed by the council of ministers on July 23rd, 1914, the day the ultimatum was sent to Serbia and it was sent to the lord lieutenants, the deputy lord lieutenants and the mayors of the municipal towns three days later.¹⁷ Although the bill did not mention such an institution, yet at the urge of the Common Ministry of War the Bulletin already spoke of the creation of a “commission for military supervision” whose task was to supervise extraordinary measures and to coordinate the activity of the military and civil authorities. The commission functioned within the Ministry of Defense, but several other ministries delegated members to it.¹⁸

So events sped up in the days before the outbreak of WWI. Prime Minister István Tisza ordered the extraordinary situation to be inaugurated on 26th July 1914, only for the southern part of the country at the time, but with the possibility to extend it to the entire country. For example, the measure of stricter monitoring of the press was introduced for the entire country. In the southern and Transylvanian counties and in the municipal towns passport emission, the right to bear weapons and the right to gather was limited, obligation to report one’s arrival in a settlement was instituted and all municipal and township ordinances affecting the police were suspended. However on July 31st these

¹⁶ <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=91200063.TVI&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D46>, last accessed 21.08.2018.

¹⁷ Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom,” pp. 50-51.

¹⁸ Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom,” pp. 90-91.

measures were extended to the entire country due to war with Russia being imminent. After the outbreak of the war extraordinary measures were put in force by the dozens.¹⁹

State Commissioners During the First World War: Miklós Betegh, the state commissioner for Transylvania

In the Transylvanian region, which was the territory of the 12th Corps of the Austro-Hungarian Armed Forces, lord lieutenant of Torda-Aranyos (Turda-Aries) county, Miklós Betegh was appointed as government commissioner. Thus he received greater power and more duties than plain lord lieutenants. Betegh was born in 1868, which means he was 46 by this time. He studied law in Budapest, then looked for a position in the county administration and after a very quickly ascending career he held the position of deputy lord lieutenant for a long time – the highest ranking of the elected offices. After the former opposition came to power he resigned and managed his estates. Later, from 1910 he was appointed lord lieutenant.²⁰ Anyway, in 1910 there was a complete change in the political elite of Hungary,²¹ since the former independent opposition, which came to power in 1906, was completely eroded and in 1910 the National Labor Party formed from the ruins of the earlier governing party came to power. Betegh remembered the years before the war as a period when neither the opposition, nor nationalistic issues posed any serious problems in the county he governed. The county was populated in majority by Romanians, just as most of the Transylvanian counties. Betegh spoke Romanian too and he had good relations with the Romanian intellectuals – at least in his own opinion. He condemned the policy of “threading on the minorities’ kibes” as Prime Minister István Tisza put it.²²

The day after the ultimatum expired he was ordered to Budapest and the ministry of interior, János Sándor – who by the way was also a former Transylvanian lord lieutenant and land owner – communicated to him that he was selected to be the government commissioner for Transylvania. At first three government commissioners were planned to be appointed in the whole country: Viktor Molnár in the north (the

¹⁹ Tóth, “A kivételes hatalom,” pp. 92-95.

²⁰ Hauf-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Kabinettskanzlei, Vortäge, Nr. 561/1910.

²¹ Judit Pál, “The Survival of the Traditional Elite: The Transylvanian Lord Lieutenant Corps in 1910,” *Colloquia. Journal of Central European Studies*, 14 (2007), pp. 75-87.

²² Miklós Betegh, *Erdély a háborúban. Néhány erdélyi adat az 1914–1917. évek történetéhez* [Transylvania in the War. Several Data on the History of the Years 1914-1917] (Dicsőszentmárton: Erzsébet Könyvnyomda, 1924), pp. 7-8.

territory of the 6th Corps),²³ Baron Béla Tallián in the south and Betegh in Transylvania. All three men were lord lieutenants and trustworthy people of Prime Minister István Tisza. Of the three men, Tallián was the closest to the prime minister, since he had been a minister in the first government formed by Tisza. The circle of government commissioners was however expanded, lord lieutenants of the border counties were also appointed government commissioners for the territory of their own county so that they would have more power if needed. In Transylvania the following lord lieutenants were appointed as government commissioners for the municipality they headed: count Ödön Bethlen for the county of Kolozs (Cluj) and the city of Cluj (Kolozsvár), László Mara for the county of Hunyad (Hunedoara), count Balázs Bethlen for the county of Szolnok-Doboka (Solnoc-Dăbâca), József Szász for the counties of Alsó-Fehér (Alba de Jos) and Maros-Torda (Mureș-Turda) and Friedrich Walbaum for the county of Szeben (Sibiu). At the same time the same appointments were made in the counties of Torontál, Bács-Bodrog and Temes (Timiș) and also the lord lieutenants of Croatia received the same commission.²⁴ Shortly after the circle was broadened with several northern counties.

At first the ministry of interior gave Betegh only one officer to assist him in his duties. Later the apparatus around the government commissioner expanded to 25 people. After he returned home, Betegh visited immediately general Herman Kövess, the commander of the 12th Corps at his headquarters in Sibiu (Nagyszeben, Hermannstadt). Contrary to his colleague, Tallián, Betegh formed a pleasant and good relationship with the general. The nature of the relations between military and civil authorities was depending on the persons fulfilling the positions. Some military commanders disregarded the civil authorities, but after cavalry General Karl von Pflanzer-Baltin was appointed as the military commander of Transylvania instead of general Kövess, Betegh created a decent relationship with him as well. At the general's request he intervened with Prime Minister Tisza to attempt to convince the ruler and the heads of the army that they would move him from Transylvania to defend the northern borders, although this tactic was unsuccessful as it later turned out. Pflanzer-Baltin was followed by lieutenant-general Viktor von Njegovan with whom Betegh had a conflict because of a

²³ Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, MNL OL) K 27 Minutes of the Council of Ministers (Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek), August 1st, 1914.

²⁴ MNL OL K 27 July 30th, 1914.

bossy officer. Since the lieutenant-general was unwilling to conduct an investigation in this matter, Betegh filed a complaint at the Common Ministry of War via the Hungarian government.²⁵ At first Betegh performed his duties at the military headquarters in Sibiu, and later when most of the military forces left Transylvania he moved back to Turda, the former seat of his county. In Sibiu he was very keen on having a good relationship with the Romanians, among others with Orthodox metropolitan bishop Ioan Mețianu.²⁶

From the very beginning there were tensions between administrative and military officials in both parts of the Monarchy. The supreme command of the army became a true center of power after the war broke out. They were convinced that the civil authorities were not firm enough in counteracting the sabotage work of the “inner enemy” (i.e. persons and groups disloyal to the Monarchy), respectively they were not doing everything in their power to help the army, which is why they aimed at taking over the control of several provinces.²⁷ The army arrested several Serbian notabilities in southern Hungary. The lord lieutenants reported this to the prime minister who took measures immediately, but such cases occurred later on as well despite the fact that Tisza intended to prevent such occurrences on the territory of Hungary also by issuing a law in this sense. The situation was similar also in the northern counties. Tisza backed up government commissioner Viktor Molnár and the civil authorities on that occasion as well and took the matter in front of the ruler ensuring Molnár that the military agents at fault will be held responsible and those offended without fault will be compensated.²⁸ Betegh mentions as well how much “worry and inconvenience” such army actions, “arresting anybody on the least credible report without making the necessary inquiries of the truth of the matter” caused him.²⁹

The relationship of the civilians and the military had been ambivalent, to say the least, earlier as well: animosity against the

²⁵ Betegh, *Erdély*, p. 41.

²⁶ Ioan Mețianu (1828-1916) was between 1875-1899 bishop of Arad, than from 1899 until his death Archbishop of Sibiu and Metropolitan of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church.

²⁷ Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Wien - Köln - Weimar: Böhlau, 2014), pp. 426-433.

²⁸ Prime Minister István Tisza to Viktor Molnár sen., Sept. 21th, 1914. *Gróf Tisza István összes munkái* [The Complete Works of Count Tisza István], ser. 4, vol. II (Budapest: Franklin, 1924), Nr. 283, p. 151.

²⁹ Betegh, *Erdély*, p. 17.

common army was continuously fed also by the independent opposition. And although the protective functions of the army were appreciated by the Hungarian population living near the borders and even more so the prospective profits coming from the provision of supplies for the army, yet the common army was never considered a true blessing. As the war broke out the army started to speak from an even higher horse and was unwilling to accept that in Hungary there were different laws to observe than in the other part of the Monarchy. For beyond the Leitha military commanders took over the control with the civil administration as well,³⁰ as they would – as we saw earlier – also in Hungary. And in those parts the system of the state commissioners was not introduced at all.

Another conflict was caused by the military calling out the civil population to do labor service. The same kind of conflict broke out in the autumn of 1915 between the commander of the 3rd Army serving in the Balkans, General Karl von Tersztyánszky and government commissioner Tallián regarding the fortification works of Fruška Gora. The case was brought to Tisza who made a matter of prestige out of it, since he reckoned that the chief command of the army (AOK) meddles in the duties of the Hungarian civil administration and in the common council of ministers he pressed for the resignation of the general. Even though the chief of general staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf tried to save him, finally the emperor consented that Tersztyánszky be replaced. However his military career did not fault, after occupying Belgrade and Serbia he received a high distinction in November 1915 and later he was promoted to commander of the 4th Army (where he was also replaced, this time due to a request coming from the German chief command). As also the analysis of Ferenc Pollmann reveals, this conflict was not merely between Tallián and Tersztyánszky, the real match was going on between the Hungarian prime minister and the chief command of the army. Beyond the debate at hand – in which the two parties intended to prove the total incapacity of the other – the AOK was attacking the system of state commissioners itself.³¹

It was not an easy task for the authorities to deal with the numerous rumors and the general tension of the population either. At

³⁰ Gernot D. Hasiba, "Inter arma silent leges? Ein Beitrag über die rechtlichen Grundlagen der österreichischen Verwaltung im I. Weltkrieg," in *Modell einer neuen Wirtschaftsordnung. Wirtschaftsverwaltung in Österreich 1914–1918*, eds. Wilhelm Brauneder, Fritz Baltzarek (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 11-32.

³¹ Pollmann analyzes the reasons thoroughly and points out that Tersztyánszky started to lose the ruler's trust earlier; there were some serious accusations against him even at the time when the war broke out. Pollmann, "Tersztyánszky," pp. 90-92.

the beginning of the war there was a rumor that the Entente intends to smuggle a large quantity of gold to Russia through Hungary and as a consequence there was a host of people hunting for cars that supposedly carried the gold.³² But the spreading of rumors caused even greater problems. For the military situation did not have the outcome hoped by the command of the Austro-Hungarian army. And when Russian troops invaded Hungary from the North and occupied the county of Máramaros (Maramureș), panic broke out also in the neighboring county of Beszterce-Naszód (Bistrița-Năsăud). Both military and civil authorities headed by the lord lieutenant fled the county. The only one who stayed at his duty was the mayor of the town Bistrița (Beszterce, Bistritz). Government commissioner Betegh rushed immediately to Beszterce-Naszód county and tried to calm down the frightened locals.³³ Meanwhile the news of the Russian invasion proved a mere hoax. The lord lieutenant was removed from his position due to this incident. Helping the refugees from Bucovina was also one of Betegh's duties who did this by helping the Austrian governor of Bucovina. Another of his duties was to investigate the various complaints, e.g. making the military pay the price of the horses confiscated by the army during mobilization. Since the military did not give any receipt for some of the horses and thus the peasants could be compensated only after long investigations.

In May 1916 the government removed every government commissioner from their positions justifying that the fronts were far enough from the borders by then.³⁴ However this proved a hasty decision, for in mid-August 1916, due to the Brusilov offensive part of the north-eastern counties were declared an internal theater of war and government commissioners were appointed again. Shortly afterwards the prime minister called Betegh to Budapest again and this time he was appointed government commissioner not only for the region of Transylvania, but also of Banat, i.e. for the territory of the 12th and 7th corps.³⁵ His seat was in Cluj at first and in Târgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely) from October. Again he had only two civilian helpers: two members of the Parliament, Miklós Vajna and Count Pál Bethlen and a captain from the border police.

In Transylvania there was practically no army in the summer of 1916. Colonel general Arthur Arz von Straussenburg, the commander of

³² Betegh, *Erdély*, pp. 21-22.

³³ Betegh, *Erdély*, pp. 27-32.

³⁴ MNL OL K 27, April 9th, 1916.

³⁵ MNL OL K 27, August 14th, 1916.

the 12th Corps introduced himself to Betegh as “the commander without an army”.³⁶ Betegh found himself in the most difficult position as a consequence of Romania entering the war in August 1916. Supposedly the military command inquired earlier about the expected reaction of the Transylvanian Romanians. In his response Betegh mentioned that there was a strong national feeling characterizing them. But he backed this statement up also with the rumor that the Russians are forming troops from the captured Romanian and Czech soldiers and officers, which later proved to be a false piece of information. The chief command of the army pressed for his resignation for this defamation and only Tisza’s consistent support could protect him.³⁷ Although according to Betegh the prime minister saw the matter differently. He trusted that the Romanians from Transylvania would be loyal to the Monarchy. Even though the army took into account a possible evacuation in the spring of 1916 they did not want to induce panic therefore at the end they did not perform the necessary measures of precaution.

Therefore the attack of the Romanians took the Hungarian authorities completely by surprise and they were utterly unprepared for it.³⁸ A typical example for this situation is that on the day when the declaration of war arrived from Romania (on 27th August 1916) and the border police informed the government commissioner that citizens of the Central Powers started to flee Romania at the news of a possible outbreak of war, Betegh reported this to the minister of interior, but he did not believe it to be true even at that moment. Late at night, after the declaration of war was handed over and nobody was in the office except him he had to inform of the news over the telephone the authorities of each county bordering Romania. But this was not an easy task, since it was quite difficult to reach any of the higher ranking officers who were authorized to receive such pieces of information at that hour, thus the government commissioner himself sat by the telephone the whole night.³⁹

The following day, after the situation was somewhat clarified, the command of the army wanted to evacuate the entire southern and eastern region of Transylvania, up to the Mureș river and to even forcedly evacuate the civil population; but the Hungarian government opposed

³⁶ Betegh, *Erdély*, p. 64.

³⁷ Betegh, *Erdély*, pp. 52-53.

³⁸ On the Romanian campaign see: Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947* [Romania 1866-1947], vol. 2 (București: Humanitas, 1998), pp. 264-280; Constantin Kirițescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României (1916-1919)* [History of the War for Romania’s Unification], vol. I-II (București: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989).

³⁹ Betegh, *Erdély*, pp. 67-68.

this vehemently. Finally the initial agreement was that only the war materials, the food, the animals and the part of the population that could be drafted will be evacuated from the counties near the border and all civilians who want to flee will be helped. The government ordered on 29th August 1916 the evacuation of 11 counties. However the authorities – neither the military, nor the civilian ones – did not manage to control the situation and panic broke out and the population fled in a mad rush – especially from the counties where the ethnic Hungarians lived. There were quite few railway carriages, anyway there were only lines with a single track and they were used mostly by the military, so the majority fled on carts causing huge jams on the main roads. The government commissioner attempted to organize somewhat the progression of the carts, he had them divided by villages and appointed them the routes they should take and the places where they could eat and sleep. After a few days committees were formed as well, these bought the animals from the refugees for a fair price.⁴⁰ The host of refugees lessened at a very slow pace, since as the Romanians advanced the population from other territories began to move away as well, although less madly than the first ones. People of Romanian origin usually stayed behind, while the Saxons – if they chose to flee – stayed within the borders of Transylvania, but over 200 thousand people moved to the inner parts of Hungary.⁴¹

En masse flight affected especially Székelyland, whose population was mainly Hungarian: in Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) supposedly only a few people stayed behind, while in Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy), the seat of Háromszék (Trei Scaune) county, only about 500 inhabitants stayed behind from a total of 8 thousand. However in Braşov (Brassó, Kronstadt), a town with mixt population, most of the 40 thousand inhabitants stayed. But it is also true that Brassó (Braşov) county registered the most flights: 1/3 of its population. In two counties of the Székelyland (Háromszék and Csík/Ciuc) ca. 10-20% of the population left.⁴²

⁴⁰ Betegh, *Erdély*, pp. 69-75. On the difficulties encountered by the refugees see the studies of Szabolcs Pataki, Lajos Kocsis and Robert Nemes in: *Székelyföld és a nagy háború. Tanulmánykötet az első világháború centenáriuma alkalmából* [Székelyland and the Great War. Volume for the Centenary of the First World War], ed. Zsolt Orbán (Csíkszereda: Csíkszereda Kiadóhivatal, 2018), pp. 162-223.

⁴¹ Csaba Csóti, "Az 1916. évi román támadás menekültügyi következményei" [The Results of the Romanian Attack in 1916 on the Issue of War Refugees], *Regio*, 10 (1999), 3-4, pp. 226-242.

⁴² Szabolcs Nagy, "Az 1916-os román megszállás egy sepsiszentgyörgyi patikus szemével" [The Romanian Occupation of 1916 seen by a Pharmacist from Sfântu Gheorghe], *Acta Siculica*, 2011, p. (307-338) 312.

For functionaries of the counties affected by battles were given seats away from the battlefield, thus for example the administration of the bordering county of Csík was seated in the town of Debrecen, which was several hundred kilometers away. Part of the functionaries – especially the staff of the civil and customs police – returned to their original place of service only from mid-October. In the town of Cluj the same train that took refugees to Budapest brought back county functionaries to their place of service.⁴³ Târgu Mureş and Cluj were two main centers for the reception and distribution of refugees. Accommodation and feeding of the refugees and their livestock and helping them travel on was a heavy burden to the authorities. The refugees were usually accommodated temporarily in schools and other public buildings. Subsidies for the two hundred thousand refugees were also handed out slowly and the amount was ill-proportioned to their necessities, therefore refugees had to fall back on their own resources and the help of the society.⁴⁴

Since the duties of the government commissioner multiplied, the number of people serving in the institution he lead increased as well. In October 1916 the staff was composed already of 25 people and Betegh was appointed also an assistant: MP Count Miklós Bánffy who became after the WWI the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs. MP Endre Vertán became the responsible deputy for public nutrition. Mandataries of the ministry of trade were in charge of maintaining the integrity of the roads and the post and telegraph services. The office of the government commissioner moved along the front line together with the military command and later moved as his own duties required it. In October it moved its seat from Cluj to Târgu Mureş, in November to Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely), in December to Sighişoara (Segesvár, Schäßburg), at the beginning of February 1917 to Târgu Mureş again, then in April to Braşov.

The government commissioner was assisted in his duties on behalf of the army as well by staff captain Gyula Gömbös who became prime minister later. The staff of the border police of Sibiu was also under Betegh's command. The ministry of defense gave the command of the 12.000 gendarmerie posts stationed in Transylvania to gendarme

⁴³ National Archives of Romania, Cluj Office (Arhivele Naționale Române, Direcția Județeană Cluj), F3 Cluj County (Prefectura Județului Cluj), Documents of the Deputy Lord Lieutenant (Documentele vicecomitelui/Alispáni iratok), Nr. 13405/1916.

⁴⁴ The Report of the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kolozs County to the Lord Lieutenant and the Administrative Committee, September 1916. Ibid., Nr. 1034/1916.

lieutenant-general Oszkár Ferry. Communication with the army was of key importance, but it proved a difficult matter. In September of 1916 there was a serious conflict between military and civil authorities related to the matter of the internation of the Transylvanian Romanian leaders. Finally Betegh succeeded in limiting this request of the army with the help of colonel general Arz. For Hungary war law provided that a person can be arrested only based on solid evidence and not merely the suspicion of committing a crime. Even so, civil authorities could only diminish the negative effects in the sense that part of those arrested were not taken to detention camps, but to another town from where they could return home within weeks.

Meanwhile since the Austro-Hungarian army was not able to intercept the advancement of the Romanian army alone, the 9th German army lead by colonel Erich von Falkenhayn, former minister of defense and chief of general staff helped it and rolled back the Romanians. Falkenhayn arrived to Deva on September 17th where the commanding staff of the army was appointed, but according to his reminiscence he did not receive any status report from either the county or the local authorities. Falkenhayn complained that even though the population was very cordial, functionaries were all the more distant, except those of German or Saxon origin. He mentions as exceptions from this rule the lord lieutenant of Brassó County, Count Zsigmond Mikes and the lord lieutenant of Fogaras (Făgăraș) county, József Széll.⁴⁵ It was typical although that in mid-September when Falkenhayn arrived, so three weeks after the Romanian attack there was no accurate status report on where the Romanian troops were exactly and whether there was any connection between the various units. The intervention of the German army brought along quick success, at the beginning of October they conquered back Sibiu and Brașov. Yet Falkenhayn complained in his memoirs that supply was tardy partly because of the overburdening of the railway and partly because of the attitude of the functionaries. Most of the Hungarians and Saxons fled and the Romanians reacted with passive resistance to the demands of the army even if they did not show any open resistance. Most of the authorities fled, and according to Falkenhayn those who stayed were not there for the army, but to defend the interest of the civilians.⁴⁶ Contrary to this fact Betegh states in his memoirs that he talked to general Falkenhayn regarding this matter and

⁴⁵ Erich von Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen den Rumänen und Russen 1916/17* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1921), pp. 14-15.

⁴⁶ von Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug*, p. 99.

the general did not allow functionaries to return to the operational territories, for functionaries “work with paragraphs” and in the battle one cannot observe paragraphs.⁴⁷

Settling back the population to their former homes meant quite a workload for the government commissioner and his office. Betegh mentions in his memoirs as well that: “Restoration after the war went quite slowly, slower than we wished. Functionaries could be put back in their places lengthily and having them take up the usual course of their work was an even lengthier matter.”⁴⁸ From September the most urgent duty was damage evaluation and reconstruction. In the first half of November the prime minister made a tour in Transylvania as well visiting the affected locations. Events brought greater losses to those who had little belongings, they usually lost all they had. One and a half thousand houses were destroyed, but due to plunder and wrecking – by both the military and the population who stayed behind – many families lost all their values and supplies.

On October 2nd the government gave the order for settling back, which provided that administrative authorities and agricultural workers return first to their posts. Yet this process could be only partially controlled, even if in theory one needed a special permit to access the evacuated territories from the end of October. Since October 17th it was organized for refugees to return home on railway, but this procedure had its own problems and in mid-December they even had to temporarily cease settling back of the refugees due to the unfavorable winter weather. Still most of the refugees were back in their homes by January 1917. Since the beginning of November 1916 it was the duty of the Transylvanian Relocation Committee organized under the common control of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Interior not only to organize the process of settling back, but also to create proper living conditions. But damage evaluation took a very long time and the sum of the subsidies could not compensate for the losses.⁴⁹

Romania entering the war and Transylvania being transformed into a battle field worsened the internal affairs as well. The opposition made the government responsible for the series of events and also the internal “peace treaty” signed between the parties at the beginning of the war fell over. After the death of Franz Joseph, the position of Prime

⁴⁷ Betegh, *Erdély*, p. 82.

⁴⁸ Betegh, *Erdély*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ Csaba Csóti, “Menekülés Erdélyből 1916-ban” [Flight from Transylvania in 1916], *Rubicon*, 27 (2016), 1, p. 74-81.

Minister István Tisza became more and more difficult, since the new ruler, King Charles IV was not sympathizing so much with the strong-minded prime minister as his predecessor and attempted to force him to reform election rights. But the government lead by Prime Minister Tisza resigned only in May 1917 and after that Hungarian internal politics became increasingly unstable. After a short period of transition one of the veterans of the Hungarian politics, Sándor Wekerle became prime minister. He had fulfilled this position two times before. However the difficult situation on the front and the increasing impediments in providing supplies for the army, radicalization of the poorer strata and increasing distrust towards the nationalities made governing more and more difficult. The fall of the government meant also that the post of the government commissioners ceased.

On June 20th, 1917 the new government accepted Betegh's resignation,⁵⁰ and József Széll, the lord lieutenant of Fogaras County was appointed in his place. At the beginning of July the government decided to reorganize "the system of state commissioners in Transylvania" as well, in order to "concentrate all the civil related tasks in the hands of one responsible executive agent during the war". The Prime Minister proposed that the Transylvanian Relocation Committee (*Erdélyi Visszatelepítő Bizottság*) and the agent of the National Public Sustenance Office (*Országos Közélelmezési Hivatal*) at Cluj would be ceased and the state commissioner's office would take over these tasks along with those of the office of the Ministry of Agriculture at Târgu Mureş. For this purpose he summoned a council inviting everybody who was interested in the matter. Széll became by this time "government commissioner for Transylvania," but his jurisdiction was extended also to the area commanded by the 7th Army, in the same manner as earlier Betegh.⁵¹ Later further state commissioners were appointed, such as Baron Emil Petrichevich-Horváth, lord lieutenant of Nagy-Küküllő (Târnava Mare) county who was appointed state commissioner for "nationalization of the schools in the counties with a Romanian majority" – as a retaliation to the Romanian's attack.⁵² Several people were appointed as regional commissioners to the National Institute of Military Hospitalization

⁵⁰ After the war Betegh stayed at home, but his career was destroyed. Obviously in the new Romanian State he could not fulfil any state position therefore he was active mainly in the ecclesiastical and social fields. He was the president of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Popular Union. He died in 1945 at the end of the Second World War.

⁵¹ MNL OL K 27, 3rd July, 1917.

⁵² MNL OL K 27, August 30th, 1917; October 19th and 30th, 1917.

(*Országos Hadigondozó Intézet*). So people were appointed as state commissioners rather to fulfill certain tasks instead of regional state commissionership.

Due to the war difficulties and radicalization of the masses in January 1918 a new government was formed lead also by Wekerle. The new government proposed certain compromises to the nationalities, but wanted to be strong-minded regarding the claims of the Social Democrats. As a consequence József Széll was released from his office and was replaced in March by former minister of interior Gábor Ugron as royal commissioner “to manage the entire land policy of Transylvania, restore the Transylvanian parts and to perform all the duties necessary to compensate the population of Transylvania.”⁵³ Ugron had to conduct his activities according to the programme of the so called Transylvanian Union (*Erdélyi Szövetség*) as he himself was a member. The Transylvanian Union was created just before WWI and it became the most successful “political lobby group for the defense of Hungarian supremacy in Transylvania” “viewing regional interests as preservation and consolidation of the Hungarian’s geostrategic position”.⁵⁴ Therefore the Union lobbied that the governments at power would interfere into policies regulating propriety and urged the reform of the election system. The Transylvanian Union was created in December 1913 at Cluj and even though it was intended as a platform independent from political parties, the majority of its members came from the opposition – especially the independent opposition. Among the founders there were several university professors, among them István Apáthy, professor of zoology at the University “Franz Joseph” in Cluj, later state commissioner who participated also to the formulation of the programme. The programme, which was significantly altered by 1914, among many other problems dealt also with the issue of state administration. State administration was intended to be freed from the influence of the political parties and to be turned into a helper and a supporter of the local communities, in order to gain the approval of the population. Learning the language of the state was considered a matter

⁵³ MNL OL K 27, January 26th, 1918.

⁵⁴ Nándor Bárdi, “Az erdélyi magyar (és regionális) érdekek megjelenítése az 1910-es években. Az Erdélyi Szövetség programváltozatai” [Hungarian (and regional) Interests in Transylvania in the 1910s. Variants of the Programme of the Transylvanian Union], *Magyar Kisebbség*, 8 (2003), 2–3, p. (93-105) 94; see also: Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen István. Politikai életrajz* [The Political Biography of Bethlen István] (Budapest: Osiris, 1999), pp. 66-104.

of key importance.⁵⁵ It was this Union that István Bethlen, the well-known Transylvanian representative of the opposition who had brought forth similar questions earlier and later Hungarian Prime Minister became one of the presidents of in the autumn of 1917. Bethlen was convinced that “the final and true aim of the Romanians of Transylvania – regardless of what anybody said – was to unite Transylvania and Romania.” Therefore he wanted to strengthen economically, politically and culturally the Hungarians of Transylvania.⁵⁶

Initially the appointment of Ugron was supposed to be more than a simple exchange of persons: on the one hand a royal commissioner was mentioned instead of a government commissioner, on the other hand the commissioner was supposed to have a broader jurisdiction and special reference was made to the execution of the programme of the Transylvanian Union. Describing precisely his jurisdiction was quite difficult. In February the council of ministers took the matter upon its agenda several times, finally it was decided that Széll would be released from office due to “the more efficient fusion of the jurisdictions,” but he will be released from office only after Ugron was appointed. The jurisdiction of Ugron’s position was established jointly by the Prime Minister and the minister of the interior together with the minister of agriculture, of justice and of public sustenance.⁵⁷ The bill of the ordinance was finished only by March and the jurisdiction of the government (and not royal) commissioner was far more restricted than the one initially proposed. The commissioner would receive a salary from the budget of the Prime Minister’s Office.⁵⁸ His headquarters were in Cluj and he had a jurisdiction over the fifteen Transylvanian counties and the county of Szilágy (Sălaj). His tasks were mainly reparation of the damage caused by the war, reconstruction, subsidization of the population and the “increased protection of the interests of the state”. He could issue ordinances if previously approved by the ministers. His ordinances could be appealed at the same ministers. And even though he had the rights stipulated in §4 of Law LXIII of 1912, it was emphasized

⁵⁵ Nándor Bárdi pointed out how similar the programme of the Union was to the programme of Iuliu Maniu in 1924. Bárdi, “Az erdélyi magyar,” p. 98.

⁵⁶ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, p. 81.

⁵⁷ MNL OL K 27, February 7th, 1918.

⁵⁸ The similarities with the centralization process after 1920 are worth noting: in 1920, the newly formed Central Commission for Unification of the new Romanian provinces, with branches in each province, was also headed by the Prime Minister.

that only pending the approval of the minister in charge. The issues that were not in his jurisdiction should be conducted in the regular procedural manner and the government commissioner could have a say in them only if they were directly affecting his tasks.⁵⁹

Ugron was in office merely for several months, then he was released in August⁶⁰ and after that only complete disintegration of the old administration followed. All lord lieutenants appointed in November 1918, after the so-called Aster (or October) Revolution had government commissioner competencies as well, but the fall of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy could not be prevented. Anyway, after the Aster Revolution, government commissioners were appointed by the new government led by Mihály Károlyi by the dozen. Kázmér Batthány, the first minister of the interior in the Károlyi government depicts in his memoirs the situation ironically thus: "One of the 'revolutionary' specialties of the October Chaos was the obsession that every possible and impossible social class asked a government commissioner to be appointed for the settlement of their own grievances. The delegation asking for a government commissioner usually 'happened' to have the designated state commissioner among them and after the speaker finished his speech he was suddenly put forward from the rear row where he humbly stayed thus far and he was proposed to occupy the position."⁶¹ Besides government commissioners for a certain county and town there were also state commissioners responsible with public sustenance, military and other problems or other branches of state administration, state commissioners for nationalities and even for each denomination.

Organization of the Government High Commissioner's Office in Transylvania

Chaos was worsened by the establishment and operation of parallel authorities in the autumn of 1918. For national councils were created also in the rural areas – in every county, town and township, and sometimes district – following the appeal of the Hungarian National Council formed during the Aster Revolution. The scope of duties and jurisdiction of these national councils was unclear from the very beginning. Therefore it was no wonder that regular local authorities made frequent complaints that national councils demand to have a say in matters

⁵⁹ MNL OL K 27, March 31st, 1918.

⁶⁰ MNL OL K 27, August 13th, 1918.

⁶¹ Tivadar Batthány, *Beszámoló* [My Memoir] (Budapest: Szépművés, 2017) (first edition: 1927), p. 339.

regarding the local administration and in several regions they abuse their power.⁶² In Transylvania the situation was even worse, since in this region Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons usually had their own national councils and militias.

The Romanian National Council created at the very end of October at Budapest communicated to the Hungarian government already on November 10th that they will take over the entire power – including state administration – in Transylvania and Eastern Hungary, in 23 counties and in the regions inhabited by Romanians of other three counties (a total of 26 counties). Then, on November 13th and 14th Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi and minister of nationalities Oszkár Jászi – unsuccessfully – negotiated in Arad with the Romanian National Council. The Council's position was that they will completely secede from Hungary. The intention of Transylvania's union with Romania was then solemnly proclaimed on December 1 by the Romanian National Assembly at Alba Iulia. The National Assembly elected a Ruling Council functioning as an interim government – in alignment with the Romanian government in Bucharest.⁶³

In November 1918 the situation was quite complicated: the old and new authorities functioned parallelly, the latter were just forming, and jurisdictions were unclear. The situation was further worsened by national and social conflicts. Clerks of the old state administration were locally removed from office or made to flee in many places. This process was concentrated mainly on notary publics and gendarmes, but in some areas even district judges' (or High Sheriff, Hung. *főszolgabíró*) offices were dysfunctional. Soldiers coming home in bulks from the front lines made public safety even worse. By the beginning of November complaints regarding high officials of the old administration being chased away, abuses, robberies and even murder were filed daily. In spite of the fact that the Károlyi government, considering the critical situation initially followed the proposal of Kázmér Batthyány, the minister of the interior and appointed everywhere state commissioners having greater jurisdiction than the lord lieutenants before them, the situation could not be controlled at all or only partially at best.

By mid-November Romanian troops crossed the Romanian and Hungarian border and occupied without any resistance an ever greater

⁶² Tibor Hajdu, *Tanácsok Magyarországon 1918–1919-ben* [Councils in Hungary in 1918-1919] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1958), pp. 45-53.

⁶³ See Vasile Netea, *O zi din istoria Transilvaniei. 1 decembrie 1918* [A Day in the History of Transylvania. December 1st 1918] (București: Albatros, 1970).

part of Transylvania. In the occupied regions an extraordinary situation was instituted and the connection to Budapest was cut by thorough control over the channels of communication. As soon as it was established the Ruling Council considered one of its main tasks to take over state administration. On December 3rd it was decided already at Alba Iulia that wherever officials had fled power should be taken over. Shortly after, Romanian national councils of the counties were instructed to take over everywhere the control over state administration.⁶⁴ As the situation became increasingly serious, Mihály Károlyi made a declaration to the Hungarian nation on December 4th, 1918 in which he informed that part of the country is being occupied by Czech and Romanian troops with the accept of the Entente and they also take over state administration. Thus he admitted the incapacity of the government to act: “the government has no power to change claims and facts,” it has to accept them, but it can still declare that it does not give up its rights.⁶⁵

In this situation the Hungarian government appointed at the beginning of December Professor István Apáthy⁶⁶, the president of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania with headquarters in Cluj as government high commissioner for Transylvania. Apáthy was also delegated to negotiate with the commanding officer of the Romanian troops the observation of the Ceasefire Agreement of Belgrade. Apáthy and his team set up very quickly the new regional power, the short-lived Government High Commissioner’s Office (GHCO) with various departments. Therefore at a certain moment Transylvania had two

⁶⁴ Gheorghe Iancu, *Contribuția Consiliului Dirigent la consolidarea statului național unitar român* [The Contribution of the Ruling Council to the Consolidation of the Romanian National Unitary State] (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1985), p. 125.

⁶⁵ “Károlyi Mihály felhívása a magyar néphez” [The Appeal of Mihály Károlyi to the Hungarian People], December 4th, 1918, in: *Károlyi Mihály levelezése* [The Correspondence of Mihály Károlyi], vol. I, 1905–1920, ed. György Litván (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1978), pp. 305–306.

⁶⁶ István Apáthy (1863–1922) became the Zoology professor of the University of Cluj at the young age of only 27. He modernized the Zoological Institute and had a new building built for it. He was a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, a founding member in the Hungarian Society for Social Studies and a member in numerous other associations. He was active in politics; locally at the beginning, first in the New Party founded by Dezső Bánffy, then in the Independent and 48ths Party. He was one of the leading figures of the municipal committee, he was first a fellow, then the master mason of the Union Lodge. On his scientific career see: Bálint Markó, *A fejlődésnek nevezett átalakulásról Apáthy István emlékezete* [On the Transformation Called Evolution. The Memory of István Apáthy], <http://adatbank.transindex.ro/vendeg/htmlk/pdf7996.pdf>, last accessed 15.11.2018.

parallel regional governmental bodies, the Ruling Council in Sibiu and the GHCO in Cluj. The Hungarian government still wanted and the Romanian government already wanted to gain authority over it. The apparatus of the GHCO was in fact based upon the organization of the Transylvanian Committee of the Hungarian National Council (or as it was usually called: the Transylvanian National Council). Therefore I will briefly present how it was created.

It was established on October 26th at Cluj. Professor István Apáthy, the local leader of the Károlyi party was elected as president and as vice-presidents were elected Jenő Janovics, the manager of the (Hungarian) National Theater of Cluj, a member of the Radical Civilians' Party and Sándor Vincze, the head of the Labor Insurance Institute, a member of the Social Democratic Party. Apáthy was a well-known scientist and he had been one of the leaders of local and regional politics for a long time. However the leftists and the Romanians had some reserves about his person. "Apáthy's name is a provocation for the Romanians and if the National Council intends to play a historic role in Transylvania, such a goal is impossible to reach with Apáthy as a leader." – summarized the concerns later one of the collaborators of the GHCO.⁶⁷ For the plan was that the National Council of Cluj would act as the Transylvanian headquarters of all the national councils in that region – regardless of nationality. However the public could be made only partially to recognize its central role and its jurisdiction for all Transylvania. The fact that the Romanians did not recognize its jurisdiction became clear from the very beginning, but later they had to face also the fact that neither did the Saxons and what was more, not even the county authorities of some of the counties – mainly those of the Székelyland. The Council was nearly helpless regarding the never ending complaints and requests for help that came towards it. For on the one hand they did not have any armed forces except for the militia and on the other hand bloodshed would have had some serious consequences.

The Hungarian National Council of Transylvania – just as the other similar organizations – acted hastily, took *ad hoc* measures, while they had to face and solve problems that regular state administration hadn't had to deal with. One of the members of the Council remembers this as follows: "Naturally the huge number of telephones were

⁶⁷ Jenő Kertész, "A tíz év előtti Erdély napjai" [Everydays in Transylvania 10 Years Earlier], I, *Korunk*, 4 (1929), 1:
http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00239/1929_01_4738.html, last accessed 15.08.2018.

constantly ringing. Everybody in Transylvania asked everything at Cluj." The rural national councils "desperately begged us for instructions in every possible and impossible case."⁶⁸ Apáthy confirms this. He recalls that initially they had no idea "that such great and heavy duties will befall us due to the collapse of the old state administration and the inertia of the new."⁶⁹ In order to cover costs of operation the Council took a loan of 250 thousand Korona from the financial institutions of Cluj with the members of the Council as guarantors. 50 thousand Korona out of this sum was given over at the beginning of November to the Romanian National Council (or Romanian Senate) in Cluj. Later the loan was repaid from the money allocated to the GHCO.⁷⁰

Due to the general chaos the ties with Budapest became looser. „The government at Budapest is just forming, [...] on the brink of chaos and republic. These days Budapest was not likely to send any help: money, armed forces or directives. And – as I recall it – the National Council seemed to be enjoying this unexpected sovereignty.”⁷¹ Vice-president Vincze explained the situation thus: although they constantly called the ministries in Budapest, there “our important questions were answered by unfamiliar people in a manner that we could neither interpret, nor use. We were completely cut off from the leaders of the revolution and of the party.”⁷² He considered that contrarily to the Hungarians, the Ruling Council and the Romanian national councils were far more organized: “Unlike us they had a long term programme to follow and their central authorities gave them the necessary instructions for their courses of action in time.”⁷³

By the end of November however the situation of the National Council in Cluj and of the Hungarian administration was becoming increasingly untenable. The day after the Romanian National Assembly

⁶⁸ Kertész, “A tíz év,” I.

⁶⁹ István Apáthy, “Erdély az összeomlás után” [Transylvania after the Collapse], *Új Magyar Szemle*, 1 (1920), 2-3, p. 154.

⁷⁰ Apáthy, “Erdély,” p. 163.

⁷¹ László Passuth, *Kutatóárok* [The Researchers’ Trench] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1966), p. 221.

⁷² Sándor Vincze, “Erdély forradalma 1918” [The Transylvanian Revolution, 1918], Archives of the Institute of Political History (Politikátörténeti Intézet Levéltára) Budapest. I would like to kindly thank Norbert Falusi for allowing me to use parts of the manuscript, who will publish selected parts of the manuscript in *Magyar Kisebbség*, March 2019.

⁷³ Vincze, “Erdély forradalma.” At another time he writes: “The Romanian national council was less loud and more efficient than the Hungarian one.”

of Alba Iulia, on the night of December 2nd, Apáthy travelled to Budapest in person to report the situation in Transylvania on the one hand and to “ask for proper instructions and material means from the government” on the other hand, and last, but not least to ask that he would be appointed government commissioner legally. Due to his illness he could meet the minister of the interior only on December 4th. At this meeting participated also the former minister of the interior and former government commissioner for Transylvania, Gábor Ugron. Supposedly it was his suggestion that they would create a Government Commissioner’s Office for the 26 counties the Romanians wanted to annex to Romania. The matter was on the agenda of the Council of Ministers on December 6th. During this meeting the minister of the interior reported the discussions he had with the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania and their request that “a central state commissioner’s office” for Transylvania be instituted. He ensured the other ministers that “this would be an organ with similar jurisdiction as the government commissioner’s office in Miklós Betegh’s time”.⁷⁴ A sum of one million Korona was allocated for the operational costs of the Government High Commissioner’s Office of Eastern Hungary. The Apáthy delegation reported also that tax offices in Transylvania do not receive any tax money, therefore war allowances would have had to be paid also from this money. Oszkár Jászi, the minister for nationalities supported the idea and Apáthy’s appointment having in view the situation of necessity created, but he considered that the Saxons should be consulted and that it should be emphasized that this is a measure “aimed at the defense of the Hungarian state”.⁷⁵

On December 8th the council of ministers had the issue on its agenda again when they discussed what Hungary’s position should be in regard to the resolutions of the Romanian National Assembly of Alba Iulia. At this point the main motivation for creating the new institution was the defense of the Hungarians in Eastern Hungary. It was also the moment when Apáthy was officially appointed as government high commissioner. He was also voted a representation allowance of three thousand Korona. Jászi reported that the Romanian National Council protested against Apáthy’s person as commissioner, but that he responded that “Hungarians under pressure will elect as their trustful bodies whomever they trust and that is not for the Romanians to

⁷⁴ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of December 6th, 1918.

⁷⁵ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of December 6th, 1918.

decide.”⁷⁶ This shows that the government saw the situation realistically. And even though the GHCO theoretically had jurisdiction over the entire Eastern Hungary, it was clear from the very beginning that it can represent Hungarian interests at most.

In Hungarian papers of Transylvania claims for the regional autonomy started to appear as well. Yet the new GHCO was not meant to decentralize, but to deconcentrate the tasks of the government. The plan of a similar organ, with jurisdiction in the entire Transylvania was proposed earlier also by Oszkár Jászi, the minister for nationalities, but at that point the government had to reject it due to the refusal of the Romanians to accept it.⁷⁷

Even though at the meeting of the council of ministers it was discussed that the jurisdiction and organization of the new institution will be elaborated by the minister of the interior in concordance with the minister for nationalities and other ministers affected by the matter, the proposal for jurisdiction and organization was in fact elaborated by József Pap, a former lord lieutenant of the city of Cluj, one of Apáthy's closest collaborators and Emil Petrichevich-Horváth, the former lord lieutenant of Nagy-Küküllő (Târnava Mare) county, the subsequent collaborator of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania.⁷⁸ The GHCO started to operate on December 9th. The High Commissioner's Office was supposed to have 18 departments, mainly featuring the ministries of the government, but sources mention only 14: the department of the interior was headed by József Pap, that of the armistice by Emil Petrichevich-Horváth, the other heads of department were mostly new people from the left parties. The department for culture was headed by Jenő Janovics, the one of public sustenance by Social Democrat Lajos Jordáki, the department in charge with relations with the Romanians was headed by another Social Democrat, Jenő Kertész. The presidential department was headed by Sándor Vincze. He did all the actual organization activity.⁷⁹ Apáthy himself described later the tasks and organization of duties thus: in the

⁷⁶ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of December 8th, 1918.

⁷⁷ Zsolt K. Lengyel, “Niedergang, Wiederherstellung, Neugestaltung, Zusammenbruch. Ungarische Reform- und Zukunftsentwürfe für Siebenbürgen am Vorabend und während des Ersten Weltkrieges,” in *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm. Siebenbürgen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, ed. Harald Heppner (Köln - Weimar - Wien: Böhlau, 2017), pp. (53–112) 101–102.

⁷⁸ Apáthy, “Erdély,” pp. 165–166.

⁷⁹ Besides these there were departments for state administration, finances, public education, estate management, transport, press and propaganda, and a department for the Szeklers. Lengyel, “Niedergang,” p. 102.

departments “were working specialists with a practical sense,” the Office had “several legal advisors and state administration specialists with a good reputation in their fields”. “It was not the Government High Commissioner’s Office’s task to perform the duties of municipalities, deputy lord lieutenants and mayors, its task was the general and unitary political governance in view of the effective legislation. And that required more specialists than those of the state administration.”⁸⁰ Vincze remembered thus the operation of the High Commissioner’s Office: “All departments were controlled and governed by the presidential department, but every department had the right to act and solve in its own scope of duties. Every department was ensured the utmost autonomy. For in the end the right to decide in all the important decisions remained in the hands of the National Council.”⁸¹

While at Cluj the GHCO was organized and it was operating – as well as it could operate under the given circumstances – the government at Budapest had many other issues to deal with as well. The minister of the interior prepared the ordinance governing the organization and jurisdiction of the GHCO, urged by Apáthy, only one day before the Romanian troops entered Cluj. Apáthy’s request was that in case of extraordinary circumstances he would have more powers than those stipulated in paragraph 4 of Law LXIII of 1912, powers “equaling the jurisdiction of the people’s government”. In the ministry of the interior several points in Apáthy’s petition were objected against: it was considered that instead of giving extraordinary jurisdiction for the 26 counties claimed by the Romanians, his jurisdiction should be established gradually as the Romanian army proceeds; he was not given jurisdiction over legal courts in order to protect independent deliberation of the judges; at every instance they insisted that people should be able to appeal to the minister of the interior against his measures; and they also opposed that he would have the right to issue ‘complementary ordinances to the effective laws’.⁸² It is therefore obvious that the government was unwilling to confer extraordinary powers that go beyond the prohibitions of Law LXIII of 1912, it was guarding its own

⁸⁰ Apáthy, “Erdély,” p. 166.

⁸¹ Vincze, “Erdély forradalma.”

⁸² The Proposal of the Government High Commissioner Appointed for the Regions Threatened to Be Occupied by the Romanian Army Regarding the Organization and Jurisdiction of the Government Commissioner’s Office by the Government, 23.12.1918. MNL OL K 148 Ministry of Interior, Presidential documents, Nr. 2869/1919.

jurisdiction and had no intention to create a regional “government” even in the last hours of its power.

Finally the jurisdiction of the “government commissioner appointed to protect Hungarian interests in the counties occupied by the Romanian army or jeopardized by such occupation and in the municipalities” was regulated in this spirit. The ministry of the interior was still willing to make it possible for him to use governing rights as stipulated in Law LXIII of 1912 in certain cases – in case the communication between him and the government was disrupted –, but even in such a case he would have had the obligation to later make a report of his actions during such a time; and he was also allowed to form further government commissioner’s offices.⁸³ But the bill was finalized too late and it was presented to the council of ministers only on December 28th when it no longer had any practical importance.⁸⁴

By the time the GHCO was operational the Romanian troops occupied even Târgu Mureş and they were waiting for consent by the Entente to be able to cross the demarcation line. Apáthy’s tasks was largely to negotiate with the Romanian commander, General Constantin Neculcea. These negotiations were quite unilateral, they reflected accurately the relation of power between the two parties: practically Apáthy managed to obtain nothing but some promises. His relation to the Hungarian government was not every fruitful either. He could expect no practical help, but in the general chaos he did not always manage to obtain even that the government would appoint as state commissioners for the counties the persons that he wanted to be appointed. In his reports he underlined several times: “Appointment of utmost urgency.”⁸⁵ Despite of this fact his candidate for Kis-Küküllő (Târnava Mică) county was not appointed even after several attempts. Appointments created heated debates even within the government itself; in the above mentioned case, for example, the ministers of the Radical Civilians’ Party were opposing the appointment.⁸⁶ Due to the situation at hand the GHCO suspended the operation of the municipal committees

⁸³ Bill Regarding the Scope of Duties and Jurisdiction of the Government Commissioner for Eastern Hungary, undated. MNL OL K 148 Ministry of Interior, Presidential documents, Nr. 2869/1919.

⁸⁴ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of December 28th, 1918.

⁸⁵ MNL OL K 148, Nr. 3787/1918.

⁸⁶ See Judit Pál, “Főispánok és prefektusok 1918–1919-ben: a közigazgatási átmenet kérdése Erdélyben” [Lord-Lieutenants and Prefects in 1918-19. The Issue of the Administrative Transition in Transylvania], *Századok*, 152 (2018), 6, pp. 1179–1214.

and of the town councils by mid-December⁸⁷ – and thus it took another step towards the elimination of the local autonomies, although the institutions of the local government were mostly frozen anyway.

Meanwhile the Ruling Council considered one of its most urgent tasks to take over state administration. Ioan Erdélyi, the plenipotentiary delegate of the Ruling Council for Budapest emphasized in his memorandum handed over to lieutenant-colonel of the staff Fernand Vix, the head of the military commission of the Entente at Budapest, that state administration should be taken over immediately, for „the usual operation of the state administration is at risk, since the Hungarian government having no authority on Romanian territories cannot solve public issues”.⁸⁸ Romanian troops were ordered to cross the demarcation line established in the Ceasefire Agreement of Belgrade.⁸⁹ At the same time the Romanian government summoned the Hungarian government to recall Hungarian troops from Cluj. Apáthy desperately asked the latter to intervene.

The Károlyi government addressed lieutenant-colonel Vix who on the one hand assured them that the Romanian troops occupy Cluj only as a strategic point, according to point 3 of the Ceasefire Agreement of Belgrade and on the other hand commanded the Romanian army not to disturb the Hungarian General Assembly summoned to December 22nd.⁹⁰ At the request of the Hungarian government a French liaison officer was also sent to Cluj to check the observation of the ceasefire agreement; and they insisted that the militia and the gendarmerie should not be disarmed. This was telegraphed also to Apáthy, but in reality the assurances had no value. The Romanian party considered the referred points of the Ceasefire

⁸⁷ The chief justice of Ocna Sibiului was notified of this fact by the lord lieutenant of Alsó-Fehér (Alba de Jos) County, December 18th, 1918. MNL OL K 803 PTI 606 f. 3 Törvényhatóságok táviratai (Municipal Telegraphs), Alsó-Fehér County, No. 344.

⁸⁸ Cornel Grad, *Contribuția armatei la preluarea și consolidarea Imperiumului în Transilvania (noiembrie 1918 – iunie 1919)* [The Contribution of the Romanian Army to the Overtaking and Consolidating the *Imperium* in Transylvania (November 1918 – June 1919)], in *95 de ani de la Marea Unire. Volum omagial*, ed. Marius Grec (Arad: “Vasile Goldiș” University Press, 2013), pp. (215–261) 233–234.

⁸⁹ General Berthelot agreed to the crossing of the demarcation line already at December 12th, but he declared it publicly only on the 15th when the Romanian army already started its advancement. Berthelot motivated his decision among others with the alleged Bolshevik propaganda of the Hungarian government, fully adopting the Romanian arguments, while according to the Czechs the Károlyi government was a reactionary government. Mária Ormos, *Pádovától Trianonig* [From Padua to Trianon] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1984), pp. 114–119.

⁹⁰ MNL OL MOL K 27 Council of the ministers of December 21st, 1918.

Agreement of Belgrade offensive and did not recognize its obligation to observe them. Supported by General Henri Berthelot they intended to occupy the entire territory they claimed as soon as possible.⁹¹

Having in view the situation at hand the council of ministers allowed the high government commissioner to pay the officers and clerks an advanced payment for three months.⁹² On December 24th the Romanian army occupied Cluj as well and not as a strategic point, but as a territory considered to belong to it.⁹³ Two days earlier Apáthy and his staff summoned a General Assembly to Cluj so that the representatives of the Hungarians of Transylvania would state their will as well. But that remained a mere symbolic gesture. On December 24th, Romanian King Ferdinand I declared in an ordinance the union of Transylvania and the other counties where Romanians lived to the Romanian state. State administration was taken over by the persons appointed by the Ruling Council. Romanian authorities had never accepted anyway the legitimacy of the GHCO, they merely tolerated it for the time being.

Therefore as a first step on December 27th some departments were united, for example the Department of Culture was ceased.⁹⁴ “Naturally we could soon determine that our territory of operation was minimal. Besides paper handling all the other departments were out of work, except the department for the relations with the Romanians. This department then started receiving daily urgent matters of larger or smaller consequence. But the official and authoritative issues of the department soon shrunk to the mere contact with the Division Commandment.” – remembered Jenő Kertész who was the head of the above mentioned department. Then he continued thus: „And it was at this time that the never ending bustle defending the interests of the civilians captured between the town-major’s office and the court-martial or the court-martial and the Citadel began, civilians who were twenty-fifths⁹⁵, restricted access or otherwise offended in their rights. These

⁹¹ In the background another dispute was going on, primarily between Berthelot and Vix. See regarding this matter Ormos, *Pádovától*, pp. 115-131.

⁹² MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of December 23rd, 1918.

⁹³ See Ignác Romsics, *Erdély elvesztése* [How Transylvania Was Lost] (Budapest: Helikon, 2018), pp. 142-164; Fráter Olivér, “Erdély román megszállása 1918–1919-ben” [The Occupation of Transylvania by the Romanians in 1918-1919], *Kisebbségkutatás*, 9 (2000), 2, pp. 242-263.

⁹⁴ Péter Sas, “Janovics Jenő feljegyzése 1919. február 27–28-i beidézéséről és kihallgatásáról” [Notes of Jenő Janovics on His Summon and Questioning on February 27th and 28th, 1919], *Lymbus*, 10 (2012–2013), p. (293-308) 303.

⁹⁵ Sentenced to receive 25 strokes with a rod.

were the matters handled by the department I headed and this was all the operational ground the Government High Commissioner's Office for Eastern Hungary had."⁹⁶

After he described the events of the last days of power Kertész also noted an interesting episode of how bureaucracy went on: "We were witnessing our ground of operation shrink to nothing day after day"; "at the Government High Commissioner's Office we handled documents all the more according to the provisions and mainly the others handled the documents. For my department could not handle documents since I considered it more important to solve the loads of complaints coming into my office – as well as I could, over the telephone for the rural areas and in person at the military authorities in Cluj." Vincze, the head of the presidential department resented this and criticized him at the last meeting of the heads of department. But Kertész had his answer ready for him: "I already stated that bureaucracy is a tragicomic act when the Government High Commissioner's Office for Eastern Hungary cannot dispose even of one of the streets in Cluj, not even the very building it functions in, let alone Eastern Hungary, for it is possibly a matter of days or hours that the Romanian army will do a perquisition on us."⁹⁷

Although the GHCO was not eliminated immediately after the arrival of the Romanian troops, yet its existence was getting redundant by the moment. Prime Minister Károlyi offered Apáthy at the end of December the position of minister of education, but he refused it. On the one hand he did not want to leave Transylvania and his office, on the other hand he disagreed with the leftist views the Károlyi government had lately adopted. He continued to remain in Cluj, despite the fact that he was warned – even in anonymous letters – that he is no longer safe. Apáthy was at a hearing also with General Berthelot who passed through Cluj in the last day of December. Berthelot assured him that his fears have no real basis and no one will oppose to his activity as government commissioner and his telephones will not be listened to. Supposedly Berthelot declared: France will not tolerate that "the formerly oppressed ... would turn into oppressors".⁹⁸ It was in the general's presence that a controversial episode took place, i.e. the alteration of the Ceasefire Agreement of Belgrade. The alteration regarded the creation of a 15 km wide neutral zone on the

⁹⁶ Kertész, "A tíz év," I.

⁹⁷ Jenő Kertész, *A tíz év előtti Erdély napjai* [Everydays in Transylvania 10 Years Earlier] III, Kolozsvár, 1929, in: "Korunk" 4, 3.

⁹⁸ Apáthy, *Erdély*, p. 172.

Deva–Cluj–Baia Mare line, which would have separated the Romanian and Hungarian armies. Apáthy came to an agreement with generals Berthelot and Neculcea regarding this matter. Neculcea insisted that also the Hungarian gendarmerie would be withdrawn east of this line, but he agreed that civil state administration would continue to operate. Still the agreement was never signed, for general Neculcea first kept postponing it, then he informed Apáthy that General Traian Moşoiu prohibited him from communicating with Apáthy.⁹⁹ Therefore Romanian military authorities completely disregarded Apáthy. Thus the activity of the GHCO came to a halt. Next Apáthy tried to organize a passive opposition of the Hungarian clerks.

On January 14th, 1919 – after previous agreement – the delegation of the GHCO went to Sibiu to negotiate with the Ruling Council, among others the division of public administration based on the percentage of nationalities. The delegation was received by Iuliu Maniu, the president of the Ruling Council. Maniu was very polite with the delegation “and he gave the theoretical resolution on the twenty-eight counties only a slight mention,” but obviously the delegation failed in its mission.¹⁰⁰ While the delegation was participating at the negotiations in Sibiu the Romanian military authorities arrested Apáthy on January 15th,¹⁰¹ motivating their action by the fact that the Romanian troops crossing the demarcation line had been attacked in village Crişeni (Cigányi) in Szilágy (Sălaj) county. This was the last chapter in the story of the institution: “It was on the day after we came back from Sibiu that the royal commissioner of the court-martial made his appearance at the offices of the Government High Commissioner’s Office of Eastern Hungary and I was summoned to his presence as well, so that as a secretary I would tell him my »secrets«. He could not believe for the world that we were in fact doing nothing. [...] At the same time and in our presence the post office was ordered that they should consider that the telephone line to Budapest was no longer at the Office’s disposal.” They still went to the office for several days, but their activity was completely void of sense: “And one day they confiscated our entire archive as well and with this act this latter

⁹⁹ Apáthy, *Erdély*, p. 172-175.

¹⁰⁰ Kertész, “A tíz év,” III, *Korunk*, 4 (1929), 3.

¹⁰¹ The committal order is dated February 26th, 1919. Zoltán Mariska, “Apáthy István politikai szerepe és pere” [The Political Role and the Lawsuit of István Apáthy], *Korunk*, 17 (2006), 3, pp. 77-89.

formed department of public law was also ceased..."¹⁰² Sándor Vincze left Cluj on December 30th,¹⁰³ the others withdrew.

When Apáthy was arrested he had theoretically been a private citizen for two days, since the council of ministers accepted his resignation.¹⁰⁴ The Hungarian government addressed General Berthelot when hearing about Apáthy's arrest; later lieutenant-colonel Vix promised them that the situation will be solved, but all attempts to improve Apáthy's situation failed.¹⁰⁵ At the end of February the military prosecutor summoned Jenő Janovics, the vice-president and others to gather incriminatory evidence against Apáthy. The authorities were interested in the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania, in how the GHCO was created, in the presence of the military in Cluj, in the Hungarian general assembly of December 22nd, but mostly in the issued brochures and flyers – the means for the alleged Bolshevik propaganda. And even if he was not asked about it, Janovics mentioned the accusation of the alleged Bolshevik conspiracy, for it was public knowledge that Apáthy was arrested with such accusations. He emphasized that he knew Apáthy very well, he is a man of conservative views and "nothing is further from him than Bolshevism," since he considered even the claims of the Social Democratic Party an utmost exaggeration.¹⁰⁶

Apáthy was accused among others of high treason – against Romanian king Ferdinand I – and conspiracy. The main heads of the charge against him were that in the Szekler counties he urged recruitment – which he did in fact following orders from the Hungarian government –, that he attempted to turn the Romanians living in Transylvania against the Romanian army and state using manifestos, which also included facts that were offending to the Romanian king and last, but not least he was the scape goat also for the attack on the Romanian troops at the township of Crişeni where 6 soldiers died and 12 were injured. The defense on the one hand questioned the competence of the court, on the other hand it underlined that Cluj was a Hungarian territory before December 24th, therefore Apáthy acted as a Hungarian citizen and high official. He did not commit high treason; his measures

¹⁰² Kertész, "A tíz év," III.

¹⁰³ Vincze went to Budapest, and was a commissar during the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

¹⁰⁴ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of January 13th, 1919.

¹⁰⁵ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of January 15th and 18th, 1919.

¹⁰⁶ This part was not put down in the minutes at the order of the military judge, therefore we know of it only from Janovics's notes. Sas, "Janovics Jenő," p. 305.

intended to calm the general public and to maintain order. And as far as the attack at Crişeni of January 14th was concerned, even the court considered Apáthy had nothing to do with it.

Apáthy's case was discussed also by the Hungarian council of ministers – and not only regarding the objection to his arrest. At the end of January the French military commission of Budapest addressed the Hungarian government to clarify whether Apáthy had the right to sign alterations to the Ceasefire Agreement of Belgrade. The minister of interior stated that he had talked over the telephone with Apáthy at the time, but he told Apáthy that the Hungarian government does not approve signing a new agreement. The council of ministers considered that the French need to be told that Apáthy had no right to sign such an agreement. The agreement was not observed by the Romanian party anyway. The minister of the interior also mentioned that: even if Apáthy's life depends on this, the interests of Hungary require it.¹⁰⁷

The epilogue to Apáthy's story is that he was imprisoned at Sibiu, Dej (Dés), Jibou (Zsibó) and Carei (Nagykároly), then at Sibiu again. Even if his circumstances of imprisonment were fairly good, the hustle and bustle undermined his health. Finally his sentence at the first degree of June 21st was five years of forced labor. He appealed the sentence and was acquitted, and then freed on December 22nd. After that – when he managed to get a passport – he settled down in Hungary at August 7th, 1920 and he was a professor at the “Ferenc József” University moved from Cluj to Szeged until his death.¹⁰⁸ The case of the GHCO was discussed in the Hungarian council of ministers last on January 23rd, 1919 when the council decided that “the Transylvanian government commissioner's office” which became available after Apáthy resigned “will remain unfilled for the time being”.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The institution of royal, respectively government commissioners had a tradition of several centuries. It was occasionally used also during the period of the Dual Monarchy when a problem transcending the competence of the regular state administration or a matter needing

¹⁰⁷ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of January 30th, 1919. For details see Ormos, *Pádovától*, pp. 112-131. Romsics considers that the agreement “was handled with reserves by both the Hungarian government and the French authorities, but they accepted it *de facto*”. Contrarily, the Romanian political and military leaders “completely disregarded it”. Romsics, *Erdély*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁸ Mariska, *Apáthy István*.

¹⁰⁹ MNL OL K 27, Council of the ministers of January 23rd, 1919.

urgent intervention (e.g. natural calamities) needed to be handled. But it started to be widely used only after the outbreak of WWI. The jurisdiction of the government commissioners was regulated in Hungary by Law LXIII of 1912. And even though the law extended the jurisdiction of the government commissioners at the expense of that of the local governments of the counties and towns, the Hungarian governments constantly made attempts to protect civil administration from the abuses of the military and to avoid the situation created in the other half of the Monarchy, where state administration was in fact "militarized".

When the war broke out regional state commissioner's offices were created – among them one in Transylvania – whose task was to maintain public order and safety and also concentration on performing military tasks in collaboration with the military commanders. The government commissioner's office ceased in April 1916 was reorganized after Romania entered the war. After that the government commissioner of Transylvania, Miklós Betegh had indeed to fulfill extraordinary tasks: organization of the evacuation of the war zones, movement of the public institutions, provision of shelter and food for the refugee population, then during the counterattack damage had to be evaluated, the population had to be relocated and partially compensated for its losses. However the state commissioner's office created at the time was an interim establishment which did not affect state administration at all or just in relation with its own tasks.

Appointment of government commissioners became a general practice as a consequence of the Aster Revolution (October 1918) when every lord lieutenant was appointed state commissioner and the institution pululated. The Aster Revolution that broke out in Hungary at the end of the war, the declarations of independence of the nationalities living in Hungary and the chaotic circumstances created an entirely new situation. The Károlyi government attempted to solve this situation by appointing government commissioners. But the operation of parallel authorities initially did nothing but create an even greater chaos.

In Transylvania parallel nation building arrived at a new turning-point: this reality was expressed in the national councils and militias parallelly operated by the Romanians, the Hungarians and the Saxons, which were all headed by the Romanian National Council, respectively the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania and the German-Saxon National Council. A few days after the creation of the Romanian Ruling Council the Hungarian government established a new regional institution, the short-lived Government High Commissioner's Office of Eastern Hungary (Transylvania). But this institution could not

operate even as an institution representing Hungarians in Transylvania, let alone to counterbalance the activity of the Ruling Council. After the Romanian troops entered Cluj, the Office was eliminated merely a few weeks of operation. The increasingly frequent use of the system of state commissioners, the revolutionary movements and the establishment of the national councils as a consequence contributed to the partial dysfunctional state of the traditional state administration and it involuntarily created the circumstances favorable for the transition towards the elimination of the local governments in the subsequent period.