

Laws of Education and the Minorities of Transylvania between 1867 and 1990: Some Considerations.

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Abstract: Through the laws passed in the educationnal field, this study aims to apprehend the governments' relation with the minorities living in Transylvania from the beginning of the Dualist era until the end of communism in Romania. If Transylvania represents a *fairy land* in both Romanian and Hungarian imaginaries, it was also the center of an intense national competition between Bucharest and Budapest during the last 150 years over the control of the region. Following the rise of national feeling, mother tongue education became one of the most sensitive aspects between the governments and the elite of the nationalities. Considering this fact, this paper attempts to analyze how has evolved the access to mother tongue education from the Dualist period to the regime change in 1989-1990, with the help of the laws enacted as well as the literature data written by the specialists of Hungarian and Romanian educations. Despite the profound differences between the regimes, many parallels exist in this matter. As the study tackles, the reinforcement of the "nation" came at the expense of school access in mother tongue for the minorities.

Keywords: Education access, Nation-building, Nationalism, Transylvania, Hungarian-Romanian relations

Rezumat: Analizând legile promulgate în domeniul educației, studiul își propune să surprindă relația dintre guvern și minoritățile care au trăit în Transilvania de la începuturile Dualismului până la sfârșitul perioadei comuniste în România. În timp ce Transilvania, reprezintă o 'țară fermecată' atât în imaginarul românesc cât și în cel maghiar, aceasta a fost în ultimii 150 de ani și în centrul unei competiții naționale acerbe între București și Budapesta pentru deținerea controlului în regiune. În urma unei creșteri a sentimentului național, educația în limba maternă a devenit unul din aspectele cele mai sensibile în dialogul guvernelor și a elitelor celor două naționalități. Ținând seama

de acest fapt, studiul încearcă să analizeze modul în care a evoluat accesul la educația în limba maternă din perioada Dualismului și până la schimbarea de regim din 1989-1990 cu ajutorul legilor în vigoare, precum și cu cel al literaturii scrise de specialiști din domeniul educației din Ungaria și România. În ciuda diferențelor profunde între regimurile politice, există paralele în acest domeniu. Studiul abordează întărirea națiunii care s-a realizat în detrimentul accesului minorităților la școli în limba maternă.

Cuvinte cheie: acces la educație, construirea națiunii, naționalism, Transilvania, relații româno-maghiare

In both Hungarian and Romanian traditional national narratives, Transylvania (*Ardeal*, *Erdély*, *Siebenbürgen*) represents a very special territory through history. Despite the fact that several linguistic communities inhabit the region at least since the Middle Ages, it's also perceived as a rigorously Hungarian or Romanian land.¹ From the late eighteenth century on, and following the French and English patterns, each elite of Central and Eastern Europe people directed towards the creation of a national, centralized and unified state for the sake of modernization. As Anne-Marie Thiesse wrote « nothing is more international than the creation of national identities », as national construction followed a similar pattern all over Europe with mutual influences.² For the reason that Transylvania was fundamental for both elites, it became the center of an intense national competition between Bucharest and Budapest along the last 150 years for the control of the region, with no less than four major territorial changes between 1918 and 1945.³

On the path towards modernity, general schooling became a central matter in order to enable economic development, but also to educate the masses in the national spirit and unify through language. Indeed, education became one of the main nationalizing institutions and was of crucial importance in transmitting national identity. While in the previous centuries the masses only had very low access to education, modernity brought a gradual change in this matter.⁴ As a matter of fact,

¹ For more information about Transylvania's role in both national consciousness, see: László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 259p. Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 286 p.

² Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, (Paris: Seuil, 1999), pp. 11-13.

³ Anders Blomqvist, 'Competing Stories about Transylvania's Past - National Stories in an International Context', in Rindzevičiūtė Eglė (eds.), *Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions?* (Stockholm: Södertörns högskola, 2006), pp. 265-358.

⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 91-97.

language turned into the watchdog of the nation and the peasantry started to embody the national spirit. One illustration of this phenomenon took place in 1844 when Hungarian was appointed as the official language of Hungary instead of Latin. Notwithstanding the improvement, national constructions started to collide, as their claims were antagonistic. In Transylvania, Romanians and Hungarians pursued two similar, but opposite paths. Hence, during the twelve decades covered by this study, the changing minorities paid much attention to schooling in the mother tongue, while the state appeared as a centralizing and assimilationist force.⁵ In the meantime, political instability also strengthened the distrust between the state and the minorities.

For Hungarians, Dualist Hungary (1867-1918) represents an economical and cultural golden age. Besides the economic successes achieved during the half-century lifelong Austro-Hungarian Empire, one of the main political issues concerned the attitude to adopt towards the 'nationalities' (*nemzetiségek*), which formed roughly 50% of the whole population in Transleithania.

As a consequence of the Great War, and formalized by the treaty of Trianon signed on 4th June 1920, Transylvania became then a part of Greater Romania.⁶ As well as Dualist Hungary, one of the main purposes was to modernize the country and to catch up with Western Europe. This "Great Union" (*Marea Unire*) fulfilled Romanian elite's dream of a Romanian national state containing all the Romanians. However, the national minorities also formed about one-third of the total population and remained a possible political threat in Bucharest's eyes.⁷ On the other hand, hitherto Trianon embodies the mournfullest national trauma for Hungarians.

Following king Mihai's abdication in 1947, the Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român* - PCR) seized power.⁸ In similar manner to the other People's democracies, the Soviet model replaced the Western one in the first decade. The communist authorities

⁵ Transylvania is a region inhabited by three main linguistic groups, Romanians, Hungarians and Germans. In 1910, 53.78% were Romanians, 31.1% Hungarians and 10.74% Germans. According to the 1977's census, 69.4% of the population declared themselves as Romanians, 22.6% as Hungarians and 4.6% as Germans. Árpád E. Varga, 'Erdély magyar népessége 1870-1995 között' [The Hungarian Population of Transylvania between 1870 and 1995], *Magyar Kisebbség*, 4/3-4 (1998): 331-407, especially pp. 380-381.

⁶ In this study, the term Transylvania does not only refer to historical Transylvania when invoking the post-WWI territory, but to all the formal Hungarian territories conceded to Romania, which include the Western half of Banat and the so-called *Partium*.

⁷ Gábor Egry, 'Phantom Menaces? Ethnic Categorization, Loyalty and State Security in Interwar Romania', *The Hungarian Historical Review*, 3/3 (2014): pp. 650-682, especially pp. 650-656.

⁸ Renamed into Romanian Workers' Party (*Partidul Muncitoresc Român*) between 1948 and 1965.

considered the national question as solved, thanks to the Leninist paradigm and as such – at least in theory – it disappeared from the political agenda. From the late fifties, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901-1965) started to take a palpable distance with the Soviet Union and laid the foundations of the so-called national communism.⁹ After a few years of transition between 1965 and 1971, when the new leader Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989) seemed to be willing to engage a new course with the minorities, he actually implemented and developed the policies previously launched by his predecessor.¹⁰

Despite the fact that several studies, in both Romania and Hungary, dealt with the mother tongue schooling in Transylvania – to the best of our knowledge – none carried out a comparison of the three periods in this respect.

In such a situation where the state mainly strove to create a national state and looked at the minorities as a threat, the purpose of this study is to compare the laws passed in the educational field throughout the three regimes. Beyond that perspective, the main goal is to analyze the differences in the attitude regarding the minorities living in Transylvania and their access to mother tongue education. In order to possess an exhaustive comprehension of the relation of the state's perception of the minorities, the laws should be put in perspective with actual data about mother tongue schooling between 1867 and 1990.

With the signature of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich* – *kiegyezés*) Transylvania was formally attached to the Hungarian administration. József Eötvös (1813-1871), Minister of Religion and Education (*vallás és közoktatásügyi miniszter*) of Hungary between 1867 and 1871, best personifies the initial progressive spirit of the Hungarian political elite in the first years of the Dualist period. Education was the main springboard to reach the long-awaited modernization of the country, as such, one of the main purposes was to expand school enrolment.¹¹ In this regard, the policies first implemented by József Eötvös were a great success as in 1913 about 85% of the 6-12 years generation attended school.¹² However, huge differences existed among

⁹ Irina Gridan 'La Roumanie de Gheorghiu-Dej, satellite récalcitrant de l'URSS: acteurs, vecteurs et enjeux d'une politique extérieure sous influence, 1944-1965', *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 1/39 (2014): pp. 147-154.

¹⁰ Zoltán Csaba Novák, *Aranykorszak? A Ceaușescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája I. 1965-1974* [Golden Age? The Hungarian Policy of the Ceaușescu System I. 1965-1974] (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro-Print, 2011), pp. 45-47.

¹¹ Paul Bödy, 'József Eötvös and the Modernization of Hungary 1840-1870', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 62/2, (1972): 1-134, especially pp. 101-108.

¹² Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* [History of Hungary in the 20th century] (Budapest: Osiris, 4th ed., 2010), p. 21.

the different confessional and national groups. While Jews, predominantly Hungarian-speaking in Transylvania and Lutherans, mainly German-speaking Saxons, enjoyed the best conditions, the Orthodox, almost exclusively compounded of Romanian speakers, were at the bottom of this ranking.¹³ These gaps are related with the deep socio-economical inequalities, not only between the ethnolinguistic groups, but also according to the religious belonging, which furthermore show a great overlap in this region. As a matter of fact, 30% of Romanians attended or had attended a school in 1868, thereafter this rate increased up to 60% after 1879. In spite of this notable progress, they remained the linguistic group showing the weakest schooling rate in Transylvania. Throughout the Dualist era, Romanians could not catch up with the delay inherited from the previous period.

This feature is very central due to the fact that the Hungarian schooling system was mainly based on denominational schools, where primary schools formed the backbone and secondary mainly remained a reality only for the upper classes. Insofar as Transylvania was a more conservative land, the church had an even stronger foundation in this part of the kingdom.¹⁴ The very central importance of denominational schools for the minorities can be seen through the fact that in 1897 in the whole country, only 1% of state primary schools had a language different than Hungarian.¹⁵

Concerning the attitude towards the minorities, the first measure taken was the nationality law, followed by the law regarding education in the primary schools (*népiskola*), both passed in 1868. If scholars agree on their liberal spirit, in fact, it turned out that the authorities poorly implemented them.¹⁶ As provided by the 58 § of the latter Act « each student can get education in his native language, if this language is one of the languages used in the township », with reference to townships' duty to establish a primary school upon the request of the families, when at least thirty children belonged to a denomination without school in the

¹³ Viktor Karády, Tibor Péter Nagy, *Educational Inequalities and Denominations, 1910: Database for Transylvania* (Budapest: John Wesley, vol. 3, 2012), p. 12.

¹⁴ Joachim von Puttkamer, 'Framework of Modernization: Government Legislation and Regulation on Schooling in Transylvania 1780-1914', in Viktor Karády, Zsuzsanna Borbála Török (eds), *Cultural Dimensions of Elite Formation in Transylvania (1770-1950)* (Cluj-Napoca: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, 2008), pp. 17-18.

¹⁵ Viktor Karády, Tibor Péter Nagy, *Educational Inequalities and Denominations, 1910: Database for Transylvania*, (Budapest: John Wesley, 2006), pp. 79-80.

¹⁶ Gelu Neamțu, *The Hungarian Policy of Magyarization in Transylvania: 1867-1918* (Cluj-Napoca: Center for Transylvanian Studies, 1994), pp. 8-10.

township.¹⁷ As early as 1868, in the civic lower secondary school (*polgári iskola*) and teacher training college (*tanítóképezde*), Hungarian was a compulsory subject alongside the mother tongue. In 1883, with the first law enacted for the secondary schools, Hungarian language and literature appeared among the mandatory subjects. Moreover, the Matura (*érettségi*) had to be taken in Hungarian for this subject.¹⁸

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, in subsequent years the nationality law became incrementally marginalized by the Hungarian authorities. In the impetus of modernity experienced by Hungary, the acquisition of the Hungarian language appeared to be more and more essential in the eyes of Budapest. Besides promoting economic development, the view was also to strengthen the loyalty of the population toward the Hungarian crown.¹⁹ As early as 1876, a new law increased education inspectors' power, even in the denominational primary schools, where they had to control the local curriculum as well as the textbooks used in the school.²⁰

This series of measures began in 1879, with the law enacted by Ágoston Trefort (1817-1888), Minister of Education and Religion in function between 1872 and 1888. The latter mandated Hungarian language for six hours a week in all primary schools of the country, which represented a real shift in the relationship with nationalities.²¹ Two years later, in 1881, a new Act set with the obligation for teachers working in the country to master Hungarian, on pain of potential dismissal if they weren't eager to learn it within four years. In the meantime, from 1882, new teachers' appointment hinged of their capability to teach in Hungarian.²²

¹⁷ «58. §: Minden növendék anyanyelvén nyerve az oktatást, amennyiben ez a nyelv a községben divatozó nyelvek egyike», 1868. évi XXXVIII. törvénycikk a népiskolai közoktatás tárgyában [Article 58 of the law No. 38/1868 on the Subject of Public Education in Primary Schools].

¹⁸ 7. §: 1883. évi XXX. Törvénycikk a középiskolákról és azok tanárainak képzéséről [Article 7 of the law No. 30/1883 on High Schools and the Qualifications of their Teachers].

¹⁹ One of the best examples of this approach can be found in Imre Sándor's article, a renowned linguist and scholar: Imre Sándor, 'Nemzetiség és nevelés' [Nationality and Education], *Budapesti Szemle*, 4/9 (1875): 42-117.

²⁰ 1876. évi XXVIII. törvénycikk a népiskolai hatóságokról [Act No. 28/1876 about Primary School Authorities].

²¹ Tibor Péter Nagy, 'Nemzetiség és oktatás a dualizmuskori Magyarországon' [Nationality and Education in Dualist Hungary], *Educatio*, 2/2 (1993): 253-269, especially p. 255.

²² 2 §, 3 §: 1879. évi XVIII. Törvénycikk a magyar nyelv tanításáról a népoktatási tanintézetekben [Articles 2,3 of the law No. 28/1879 on the Teaching of the Hungarian Language in Popular Instruction Institutions].

The law concentrating the discontent of the minorities is undoubtedly the one passed in 1907, commonly known as the “Apponyi law”. Albert Apponyi (1846-1933), Minister of Education and Religion between 1906 and 1910, became the apostle of Magyarization and best embodied the change in direction taken by Budapest in this matter. As the Act stated:

« All schools and all teachers, regardless of the nature of the school and whether or not they receive state aid, have a responsibility to develop and strengthen in the souls of children the spirit of belonging to the Hungarian homeland and the sense of belonging to the Hungarian nation».²³

In addition, as provided by the 17th paragraph, any questioning of Hungary’s integrity may lead to sanctions. In the case of schools receiving state aid, the curriculum and textbooks used for geography, history, Hungarian language, arithmetic and civic education could be chosen solely by the state. However – and despite the fears expressed by the elites of the national minorities – this did not mean the teaching of these subjects in Hungarian.²⁴

Moreover, the Minister aimed at promoting Hungarian as the single language used in schools with several language groups. In fact, the law required that:

« If the number of Hungarian native speakers reaches twenty or makes up to 20% of all students enrolled: for them, the Hungarian language must be used as the language of instruction. If at least half of the students enrolled are native Hungarian speakers, the language of instruction is Hungarian, but school administrators can ensure that non-Hungarian-speaking students receive education also in their native language ».²⁵

²³ «17 §: Minden iskola és minden tanító, tekintet nélkül az iskola jellegére és arra, hogy állami segílyt élvez-e vagy sem, a gyermekek lelkében a magyar hazához való ragaszkodás szellemét és a magyar nemzethez való tartozás tudatát [...] tartozik kifejleszteni és megerősíteni », 1907. évi XXVII. törvénycikk a nem állami elemi népiskolák jogviszonyairól és a községi és hitfelekezeti néptanítók járandóságairól [Article No. 27/1907 on the Legal Relations of Non-State Elementary Popular Schools and the Remuneration of Community and Denominational Schools Folk Teachers].

²⁴ Béla Bellér, ‘A nemzetiségi iskolapolitika története Magyarországon 1918-ig’ [The History of School Policy for the Nationalities in Hungary until 1918], *Magyar pedagógia*, 74/1 (1974): 47-65, especially 59-62.

²⁵ «18 §: ha pedig a magyar anyanyelvűek száma a huszat eléri, vagy az összes beirt növendéknek 20%-át teszi: számukra a magyar nyelv, mint tannyelv okvetlenül használandó. Ha pedig a beirt tanulóknak legalább fele magyar anyanyelvű, a tanítási nyelv a magyar, de az iskolafentartók gondoskodhatnak arról, hogy a magyarul nem beszélő növendékek anyanyelvükön is részesüljenek oktatásban », 1907. évi XXVII. törvénycikk.

Through this reform, all teachers obtained the status of civil servant, whose salary corresponded to the remuneration scale offered by the Hungarian state. If, at first sight it can be interpreted as a step further toward modernization, this reform had a serious consequence for the national groups. Indeed, if the institution in charge of the establishment could not support its schools, then the state aid was only granted if the staff was able to prove its knowledge of Hungarian, as well as its capacity to teach it. As a continuation, when 20% of the pupils in a school wished to study in Hungarian and the municipality did not have another school, Hungarian automatically became the language of instruction, without the possibility to change it afterwards.²⁶

In the Transylvanian case, if the Lutheran Church had the necessary resources, the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches had to apply for state subsidies and therefore tended a little more towards a state dependency. On the other hand, a year later, in 1908, elementary education became free of charge, which severely hampered the financial autonomy of the churches and made them more and more subordinate to Budapest.²⁷

Data about the situation of mother tongue schooling for Romanians reveals that in 1910, 74.6% of the enrolled Romanians attended a Romanian school in Hungary. Furthermore, five years later this rate decreased to 70.6%, while 99.7% of the Hungarians studied in Hungarian.²⁸ Regardless of this decrease, the number of Romanian educational institutions expanded from 2,569 to 2,901 between 1869 and 1914.²⁹ In the meantime, the Romanian population grew from 2,492,500 to 2,829,389 between 1869 and 1910, showing then a very slight difference between the demographic growth (+13.5%) and the number of Romanian schools (+12.9%).³⁰

The situation of secondary schools (*gimnázium – reáliskola*) shows a significant paradox, as the overwhelming majority of secondary schools in the country taught in Hungarian, although Hungarians made up only about 50% of the population. In 1910, the country had two hundred and

²⁶ 18 §: Ibid.

²⁷ 1 §: 1908. évi XLVI. Törvénycikk az elemi népiskolai oktatás ingyenességéről [Article 1 of the law No. 46/1908 on Free Elementary Education], Ágoston Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching: Hungarian in the Primary Schools of the late Dual Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 125-132.

²⁸ Nagy, 'Nemzetiség és oktatás a dualizmuskori Magyarországon', pp. 259-261.

²⁹ Sándor Bíró. *Kisebbségben és többségben. Románok és magyarok 1867-1940* [In Minority and in Majority. Romanians and Hungarians 1867-1940] (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro-Print, 2002), pp. 144-149.

³⁰ Varga, 'Erdély magyar népessége 1870-1995 között', pp. 380-381.

thirty-two Hungarian secondary schools, eight German-speaking schools held by the Lutheran Church of the Saxons, five Romanians and one Serbian.³¹ Social rise undoubtedly meant a fast Magyarization as far as the vast majority of secondary schools taught in Hungarian and were perceived as an indispensable tool on the way to a modern state.

As previously mentioned, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire caused great territorial changes in Central Europe and 102,000 km² previously belonging to the Hungarian crown became henceforth part of the Romanian kingdom. In the aftermath of the peace treaties, and mainly in order to secure these territorial gains, the Romanian government signed the Treaty for the minorities, which established that:

« Roumania will provide in the public educational system in towns and districts in which considerable proportion of Roumanian nationals of other than Roumanian speech are resident adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Roumanian nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision shall not prevent the Roumanian Government from making the teaching of the Roumanian language obligatory in the said schools ».³²

As Sorin Mitu pointed out, Romanian rule over Transylvania marked a great upheaval, insofar as the Romanians were hitherto dominated by the Hungarians or the Habsburg.³³ In the educational field, the main issue centered on the deep inequalities in access to education between the different language groups. The rebalancing came at the cost of discriminatory measures against the Hungarian and German minorities and therefore affected their attachment to the Romanian state.³⁴ As such, state schools were Romanianized and many denominational schools had to close due to their lack of financial resources, as well as the zeal of the new Romanian authorities.³⁵

On the other hand, the differences in development existing between the former territories of Hungary and the Old Kingdom of

³¹ Viktor Karády, 'Les inégalités ethniques et confessionnelles dans les performances scolaires des bacheliers en Hongrie 1851-1918', *Histoires et mesures*, 29/1 (2014): 167-194, especially 174.

³² Société des Nations, *Recueil des traités*, vol. 5, n°140, 1921. p. 336-342.

³³ Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), pp. 30-34.

³⁴ In order to apprehend the extent of the gap between Romanians and Hungarians on this topic see the two following studies, both written in French for an international audience, but with tangible differences in the scope of mother tongue schooling in Romania: Silviu Dragomir, *La Transylvanie roumaine et ses minorités ethniques* (Bucharest: Imprimerie nationale, 1934), 281 p.; Ferenc Olay, *Un nationalisme exaspéré dans le Sud-est européen* (Budapest: Danubia, 1935), 45 p.

³⁵ Bíró. *Kisebbségben és többségben. Románok és magyarok 1867-1940*, pp. 352-357.

Romania were glaring. Besides the economic disparity, the literacy rate differed conspicuously between the two entities, since in Transylvania in 1930, 67.4% of the population over six years old could read and write, compared to 56.1% in the Old Kingdom and only 38.2% in Bessarabia.³⁶ Before 1918, the duration of compulsory schooling was of four years in Romania, but was increased to seven years in 1924, while the school curriculum was obviously unique and unified throughout the country.

From a legal point of view, the main reform of the primary school system dates from 1924 and defined the educational policy of Greater Romania for the entire period until 1939. The minorities' treatment in the country recalls in more than one respect the measures taken by Budapest before 1918. The law on private education (*lege asupra învățământului particular*) was adopted in 1925 as a complement to the law of 1924, both under the supervision of Constantin Angelescu (1869-1945) Minister of public instruction (*ministrul instrucțiunii publice*) between 1922 and 1928. Despite the fact that, during Dualism, one of the main concerns of the Romanian elite was due to the making of Hungarian as a compulsory subject in all primary schools, the Romanian government implemented the same policy.³⁷

As with the measures taken in Hungary, to be allowed to work, teachers had to take a Romanian language test and to certify their level of knowledge in Romanian history, geography and constitution.³⁸ As a continuation, these three subjects had to be taught in Romanian, since they were considered as "national subjects". Once again, the will to create a stable and strong state was confronted by the centrifugal inclination expressed by the minorities. In this framework, and as Mirela Luminița Murgescu underlined, history's teaching bore a deep political function: educate the people in a patriotic manner to strengthen the roots of the new regime.³⁹

³⁶ Attila Gidó, *School Market and the Educational Institutions in Transylvania, Partium and Banat between 1919 and 1948* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul Pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2011), p. 8.

³⁷ See for instance the text of the Memorandum sent in 1892 to Vienna as a protest against the attempts of Magyarization launched by Budapest. About the parallels between the Monarchy and Successor states see: Pieter Judson, 'Where our Commonality is necessary...: Rethinking the End of the Habsburg Monarchy', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 48 (2017), pp. 1-21.

³⁸ Articles 114, 118: *Lege pentru învățământul primar al statului și învățământul normal-primar din 26 Iulie 1924* [Law for the state primary education and normal-primary education of July 26, 1924], ed. Gheorghe Bunescu, *Antologia legilor învățământului din România* (Bucharest: Institutul de științe ale Educației, 2004), p. 200.

³⁹ Mirela Luminița Murgescu, 'L'enseignement de l'histoire dans les écoles roumaines, 1831-1944', *Histoire de l'éducation*, 86 (2000): 115-142, especially 122.

The “novelty” brought about by the 1924 law laid in its discriminative feature in the field of minority schools’ access. Thus, as the act stated, « citizens of Romanian origin who have lost their mother tongue are obliged to educate their children only in public or private schools with Romanian as the language of instruction ». ⁴⁰ Consequently, pupils with a possible Romanian origin, but with a different mother tongue, had to be enrolled in a Romanian-language school. This practice resulted in numerous abuses, which aimed at promoting education in Romanian-language schools, based on family names or families’ genealogical tree. In addition, the Romanian state refused students in a minority school, if they belonged to another national group. This measure particularly affected Transylvania’s Jewry, considered as a distinct ethnic minority for the purpose of weakening the Hungarian element on this disputed territory. Although they were overwhelmingly Magyar-speaking and of Hungarian culture, Jewish children had to be educated in Romanian or in Hebrew. ⁴¹ In this matter the 1925 Act stated as follows:

« 35 §. The language of instruction in private schools, attended by students whose mother tongue is other than the state, will be established by the proponents of the school. However, only students whose mother tongue is the same as the language of instruction of the school will be accepted in these schools. 36 §. In private Jewish schools, the language of instruction is Romanian or Hebrew ». ⁴²

The immediate aftermath of this kind of policy implementation resulted in a wave of school Romanization all around Transylvania. In that respect, formal Hungarian schools were turned into Romanian ones, referring to the necessity to renationalize Romanian fellows. As Irina Livezeanu shows, this action took place even in Szeklerland, a region largely inhabited by Hungarians. ⁴³ Attila Gidó’s research demonstrates

⁴⁰ « Cetățenii de origine română, care și-au pierdut limba maternă sunt datori să-și instruiască copiii numai la școalele publice sau particulare cu limba română de predare », *Lege pentru învățământul primar al statului și învățământul normal-primar din 26 Iulie 1924*, p. 187.

⁴¹ For more information about the situation of the Transylvanian Jewry, refer to Attila Gidó, ‘L’enseignement préscolaire et pré-universitaire juif de Cluj à l’époque de l’entre-deux-guerres’, *Revue de Transylvanie*, 18/2 (2009): pp. 106-123; Zvi Hartman, ‘A Jewish Minority in a Multiethnic Society during a Change of Governments: the Jews of Transylvania in the Interwar Period’, *SHVUT*, 9/25 (2001): 162-182, especially 175-177.

⁴² « 35 §: Limba de predare în școalele particulare, frecventate de elevi ai căror limbă maternă este alta decât a Statului, se va stabili de susținătorii școlii. În aceste școale nu se vor primi însă decât elevi a căror limbă maternă este aceeași cu limba de predare a școlii. 36 §: În școalele particulare evreești limba de predare este limba română sau limba evreească », *Lege asupra învățământului particular din 22 decembrie 1925* [Law on private education of December 22, 1925], ed. Bunescu, *Antologia legilor*, p. 223.

⁴³ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 138-143.

that denominational school's numbers dropped from 3,223 in 1920 to 1,210 in 1927. As a consequence, in 1920 40.2% of pupils were enrolled in a state school, against 84.1% in 1936. In the meantime, less than 1% of the Romanian children attended a denominational school in Transylvania during the interwar period, which means that such schools were overwhelmingly for the German and Hungarian minorities. Moreover, denominational schools enjoyed a very scarce support from the state, which also tended to crystallize bitterness towards Bucharest.⁴⁴

The 1939 act well illustrates the nationalistic atmosphere all around Europe on the eve of the Second World War. Indeed, from the right to have a mother tongue access to education, the law had evolved to the possibility to benefit from it on the Ministry of Education's good will:

«In all state schools, education and teaching are done in the Romanian language. In localities with a very large minority population and where there are at least 20 school-age children, schools with the language of instruction of the respective minorities or sections attached to Romanian schools may be established, with the approval of the Ministry of National Education. In the minority state schools and sections, the Romanian language, the history and geography of Romania, as well as notions of civic instructions will be taught in Romanian as compulsory educational subjects ».⁴⁵

Signed on 30 August 1940, the Second Vienna award assigned back to Hungary Northern Transylvania. Considered for some as a repair and the triumph of justice after the humiliation of Trianon, others regard it as a national trauma and a genuine *diktat*. If, at first, the Hungarian authorities strove to develop sympathy towards Hungary among Romanians, this attitude did not last long and the previously Romanianized state schools were Hungarianized again and by this the resentment among Romanians increased.⁴⁶ In Southern Transylvania,

⁴⁴ Gidó, *School Market and the Educational Institutions in Transylvania, Partium and Banat between 1919 and 1948*, pp. 28-33.

⁴⁵ « 7. §: în toate școlile de Stat, educația și învățământul se fac în limba română. În localitățile cu populație minoritară foarte numeroasă și unde există un număr de cel puțin 20 de copii în vârstă de școală, se pot înființa școli cu limba de predare a minorităților respective sau secții pe lângă școlile românești, cu aprobarea Ministerului Educației Naționale. În școlile și secțiile minoritare de Stat sunt obligatorii ca obiecte de învățământ limba română, istoria și geografia României, precum și noțiuni de instrucțiuni civice care se vor preda în românește », *Lege pentru organizarea și funcționarea învățământului primar și normal din 27 Mai 1939* [Law for the Organization and Functioning of Primary and Normal Education of May 27, 1939], ed. Bunescu, *Antologia legilor*, p. 277.

⁴⁶ János Szlucska, « *Pünkösdi királyság* »: *az észak-erdélyi oktatásügy története, 1940-1944* [« Pentecostal Kingdom »: History of Education in Northern Transylvania, 1940-1944] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2009), pp. 226-227.

where about 400,000 Hungarians and almost half million Germans remained under Romanian authority, the situation also worsened.⁴⁷ The implemented policy of reciprocity came once again at the expense of minorities living on both sides of the border.⁴⁸ By the end of the war, Romania eventually managed to regain Northern Transylvania with the support of the Soviet Union, thereafter formalized by the Treaty of Paris signed on 10 February 1947.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Romania inherited a heavy burden when it comes to granting rights to national minorities and especially in the educational field. As soon as the whole of Transylvania came back under Romanian rule, the traditional parties intended to continue the educational policy of the interwar period. Nevertheless, the relationship with national minorities changed considerably with the coming to power of Petru Groza (1884-1958) in March 1945, himself a perfect Hungarian speaker trained in Budapest during Dualism. The latter strove to emphasize respect for the rights of minorities, in particular in order to show the best possible image of Romania to the Great powers, as part of the competition with Hungary for Transylvania.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the purpose was to mark the break with open nationalism from the previous regime. It is however important to stress out that nationalism did not disappear from the stage, as the Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's example shows. This staunch communist served as the Minister of Justice between August 1944 and February 1948 and delivered two speeches in Cluj in 1945 and 1946. In this instance, he openly criticized the lack of national spirit of the Hungarian community toward Romania as well as their revisionism. Being one of the main hurdles on the path toward power for Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the latter took the opportunity and arrested him in 1948 basing his charge on Pătrășcanu's nationalism and deviationism.⁵⁰

In the educational field, the eradication of illiteracy rose to a national priority for the authorities, since it still affected about a quarter of the population after the Second World War. The enrollment of 92.1% of

⁴⁷ Varga, 'Erdély magyar népessége 1870-1995 között', p. 349.

⁴⁸ János Kristóf Murádin. 'Minority Politics of Hungary and Romania between 1940 and 1944. The System of Reciprocity and its Consequences', *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, 16 (2019): 59-74, especially 64-66.

⁴⁹ Cristina Petrescu, 'Who was the First in Transylvania? On the Origins of the Romanian-Hungarian Controversy over Minority Rights', *Studia Politica*, 3/4 (2003): 1119-1148, especially 1124-1125.

⁵⁰ Antonio Faur, 'Considerații cu privire la discursurile rostite la Cluj în iunie 1945 și 1946 de către Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, ministru de justiție' [Considerations Regarding the Speeches given in Cluj in June 1945 and 1946 by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Minister of Justice], *Analele banatului*, 16 (2008): 333-341.

youth in 1948-1949 witnesses this progress and for the first time in Romanian history, a situation of almost full schooling could be reached.⁵¹

The complete seizure of power by the Romanian Communist Party had as a direct consequence the nationalization of denominational schools in the country. However, since the interwar period, the latter acted as a safeguard for education in minority languages. As such, in 1947, 45% of the Hungarian pupils studied in a denominational primary school and even 75% in the case of the secondary schools.⁵² In a wider perspective, the attitude of the PMR *vis-à-vis* the Catholic Church should be seen in the global context of denigration of the Holy See as an agent of the West and a reactionary force by the various Communist parties.⁵³

From then on, the national orientation was replaced by Marxist internationalism with an unprecedented ideologization of education. In the meantime, the PMR recognized national fact's existence, based on the Soviet pattern and as provided by the 1948 law: « for schools of cohabiting nationalities, their specific character will be taken into account ». ⁵⁴ Besides this recognition, Romanian was a compulsory subject, and the teaching of the so-called “national subjects” remained a highly debated issue.

While the situation of Hungarian-language education proved stable for primary schools, many secondary schools had to close their doors or to be transformed into Romanian-language schools. The notable exception concerns the Hungarian Autonomous Region (*Magyar Autonóm Tartomány – Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară – HAR*), created in 1952, which pretty near corresponded to the limit of the Szeklerland until 1960.⁵⁵ The region comprised about one-third of the Hungarian minority and its Magyar-speaking inhabitants enjoyed full access to Hungarian-language schools. Thus, for the school year 1952-1953, in 80% of the 250 primary schools and 75% of the 12 secondary schools in the region, the language of instruction was Hungarian.⁵⁶ This situation is one great illustration of

⁵¹ Loredana Tănăsie, ‘Anul 1948 și învățământul românesc’ [The year 1948 and the Romanian Education], *Memorial 1989. Buletin științific și de informare*, 14 (2014): 108-118, especially 109.

⁵² Vincze Gábor, ‘A romániai magyar kisebbség oktatásügye 1944 és 1989 között. II. rész. (1948-1965)’ [The case of Education for the Hungarian Minority in Romania between 1944 and 1989. Part 2 (1948-1965)], *Magyar Kisebbség*, 3-4 (1997): 375-403, especially 375-377.

⁵³ Philippe Chenaux, *L’ultima eresia: la Chiesa cattolica e il comunismo in Europa da Lenin a Giovanni Paolo II*, (Rome: Carocci, 2011), pp. 159-178.

⁵⁴ « Pentru școlile naționalităților conlocuitoare se va ține seamă de caracterul lor specific », *Decretul nr. 175/1948 pentru reforma învățământului* [Decree no. 175/1948 for Education Reform], *Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 177 din 03 august 1948*.

⁵⁵ For a history of the HAR see: Stefano Bottoni, *Stalin’s Legacy in Romania: The Hungarian Autonomous Region, 1952-1960* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 397 p.

⁵⁶ Gábor Vincze, ‘A romániai [...] II. rész’, pp. 375-403.

the numerous paradoxes existing in Central and Eastern Europe. If the Stalinist represents a period where freedom was largely denied, it is also the time when the Hungarian minority enjoyed the best facilities in terms of access to mother tongue education.

However, this situation did not last long. Instead of destalinization, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej preferred to replace internationalism by a more nationalistic line at the expense of the minorities, while from 1956 onwards, the Hungarian revolution gave him a great pretext.⁵⁷ As early as 1955, the Romanian General Secretary limited access to vocational schools in the language of the minorities, by referring to the need to eradicate Hungarian irredentism from Romania. It is in this regard that, from 1959, the language of instruction of the so-called national subjects became once again Romanian. At the same time and during the same year, Romanian classes increased from two to six hours a week in minority schools.⁵⁸

Ceaușescu's accession to power in 1965 resulted in a major reform, adopted in 1968. As many Romanian education specialists demonstrate, this reform turned out to be primarily the result of a political will, rather than the result of a debate between specialists, even if they participated in its development. The Romanian leader aimed at making the change tangible with his predecessor Gheorghiu-Dej, while polishing his image as a reformer.⁵⁹ This profound revision of the 1948 law also initiated a return to national traditions as well as the ambition of a partial abandonment of the Soviet model, although as Cătălina Mihalache demonstrates, this reform is largely inspired by the measures taken in the other socialist countries.⁶⁰ Concerning the minorities, no major modification can be found as the law still guaranteed the access of mother tongue schooling for the minorities as following:

« In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, for cohabiting nationalities, education of all grades is also conducted in their own language. The Ministry of Education ensures the training of the

⁵⁷ Stefano Bottoni, 'De la répression politique à la purge ethnique? L'impact de la révolution de 1956 sur le modèle communiste roumain', Dan Cătănuș, Vasile Buga (eds), *Lașărul comunist sub impactul destalinizării 1956* [The communist camp under the impact of de-Stalinization] (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), pp. 365-368.

⁵⁸ Katalin Oanță, 'Situația învățământului în limba maghiară sub regimul lui Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej' [The Situation of Education in Hungarian under the Regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej], *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie George Barițiu*, 54 (2015): 223-247, especially 228-230.

⁵⁹ Cristian Vasile, 'Towards a New Law on Education: some Reflections Regarding the Communist Educational Policies under the Ceaușescu Regime', *Revista istorică*, 25/5-6 (2014): 493-502, especially 495-500.

⁶⁰ Cătălina Mihalache, 'Antireformă și reformă în școală, la căderea regimului comunist' [Anti-reform and School Reform at the fall of the Communist Regime], *Romanian Political Science Review*, 8/42 (2008): 849-868, especially 854-857.

teaching staff necessary for education in the languages of the cohabiting nationalities. In the admission competitions provided for in this law, candidates have the right to take the examinations in their mother tongue in the subjects they have studied in this language ».⁶¹

If the first years of the Ceaușescu era showed a certain kind of appeasement between the Party and the minorities, it was due to special circumstances. In the context of the diplomatic clash with the Soviet Union, the Romanian leader could not afford a lack of cohesion in the Romanian society and in this respect, he made a step toward the minorities.⁶² Although the year 1971 is generally seen as the turning point in the stance on the minorities' issue, the 1978 law did not bring any clear policy reversal. The only shade lies on the possibility to teach some subjects in Romanian, which paves the way for a Romanianization of education.

Access to vocational schools in a minority language remained strictly limited, as G bor Vincze's study illustrates it: in 1974, 6.5% of the pupils studied in Hungarian in primary schools, 5.7% in high schools and barely 1.3% in vocational schools.⁶³ In fact, this issue concentrated the dissatisfaction of the Hungarian minority. On this topic, the 1978 law stated that:

«At vocational schools, foremen's schools, qualification courses and mass agro-zoo technical education, which operate in these localities, the teaching activities can also be carried out in the languages of the cohabiting nationalities. For this purpose, in the educational units, primary, secondary and high school, where the languages of the cohabiting nationalities are taught, the Romanian language is studied, and some subjects, provided in the curriculum, can be taught in Romanian ».⁶⁴

⁶¹ «  n conformitate cu prevederile Constituției, pentru naționalitățile conlocuitoare,  nvățăm ntul de toate gradele se desfășoară și  n limba proprie. Ministerul  nvățăm ntului asigură pregătirea personalului didactic necesar  nvățăm ntului  n limbile naționalităților conlocuitoare. La concursurile de admitere prevăzute  n prezenta lege, candidații au dreptul de a susține probele  n limba maternă la disciplinele pe care le-au studiat  n această limbă », *Legea nr. 11/1968 privind  nvățăm ntul  n Republica Socialistă Rom nia* [Law no. 11/1968 on Education in the Socialist Republic of Romania], ed. Bunescu, *Antologia legilor*, p. 347.

⁶² Nov k, *Aranykorszak?*, pp. 45-49.

⁶³ G bor Vincze, 'A rom niai magyar kisebbs g oktat s gye 1944  s 1989 k z tt. III. r sz. (1965-1989)' [The case of Education for the Hungarian Minority in Romania between 1944 and 1989. Part 3 (1965-1989)], *Magyar Kisebbs g*, 3/3-4 (1997): 289-317, especially 295-297.

⁶⁴ « La școlile profesionale, școlile de maiștri, cursurile de calificare și  nvățăm nt agrozootehnic de masă, care funcționează  n aceste localități, activitățile didactice se pot desfășura și  n limbile naționalităților conlocuitoare.  n acest scop,  n unitățile de  nvățăm nt, primar, gimnazial și liceal, cu predarea  n limbile naționalităților conlocuitoare, se studiază limba română, iar unele discipline, prevăzute  n planul de  nvățăm nt, se pot preda  n limba

As provided by the act, only some classes could be taught in the language of the minority, to this extent the ambiguity led to large reductions.⁶⁵ Despite the fact that no major change appeared in the legislation, access to mother tongue schooling worsened significantly from the 1970s.

Assimilation had never been put on the official political agenda, although it became a clear objective for the Romanian elite in the frame of its national construction. The nationalist shift experienced by the Romanian power was to be achieved at expense of education in the languages of nationalities and this restriction followed a well-established process. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the Romanian school system suffered from the economic crisis as a whole, not only minorities' schools.⁶⁶

Within the framework of the 'socialist fraternity', the Romanian and Hungarian-speaking establishments were forcibly unified. As a result, Hungarian disappeared as the administrative language of the school, with the added bonus of the removal of symbols in Hungarian from the school environment. Over time, the Hungarian sections were merged into its Romanian counterparts, justified by the need to carry out budget cuts or by staff shortage.

Finally, the second process consisted of opening a class in a minority language only when twenty-five families requested it for a primary school and respectively thirty-six in the case of secondary education. This system mainly penalized minorities scattered in regions with a strong Romanian majority, such as Banat or southwestern Transylvania in the case of the Hungarians.⁶⁷ In regions inhabited mainly by Hungarians, another method was to be used, with the creation of Romanian sections in Hungarian educational facilities without a minimum threshold. In the 1980s, this method made possible to open Romanian-language classes with a few Romanian-speaking students and a majority of Magyar speakers. As a consequence of these policies, access

română », *Legea educației și învățământului nr. 28/1978* [Law on Education and Instruction no. 28/1978], ed. Bunesco, *Antologia legilor*, p. 381.

⁶⁵ Zoltán Csaba Novák, *Holtoágányon. A Ceaușescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája II. 1974-1989* [On a dead track. The Hungarian Policy of the Ceaușescu System II. 1974-1989] (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro-Print, 2017), pp. 37-39.

⁶⁶ Constantin Dan Rădulescu, 'Învățământul românesc 1948-1989 - între derivă și recuperare instituțional funcțională' [Romanian Education 1948-1989 - between Drift and Functional Institutional Recovery], *Calitatea vieții*, 17/3-4 (2006): 307-318, especially 315-317.

⁶⁷ Csanád Demeter, 'A székelyföldi oktatás az 1960-1980-as években' [Education in Szeklerland in the 1960s and 1980s], *Prominoritate*, 1 (2012): 93-109, especially 100.

to mother tongue schools for national minorities decreased tangibly. In the last five years of the regime, education in Hungarian decreased by 30% and even affected the so far spared Szeklerland.⁶⁸

From a constitutional monarchy to a post-Stalinist power through a far-right dictatorship, the analysis of three regimes' behavior shows tangible common features in the field of mother tongue schooling, despite the strong differences between them.

In the first years of each period, authorities showed a short-term openness toward the minorities, as the laws and data could certify. The measures taken met the European standards and even exceeded it to several extend, with the will to integrate the minorities on the road toward a modern and prosperous state.

However, throughout the three periods, these policies quickly confronted with the national construction, in which minorities appeared as a major obstacle. Homogenization or at least the attempt to forge the attachment to the state, through the credo one nation, one language appeared as an unavoidable appeal.⁶⁹ All along the three periods, the laws sanctioned the desire to modernize the country and to strengthen the state. The fear of the minorities, as a possible political threat but also a danger in respect of the nation's survival was at stake, while their lack of devotion to the state and actual - or imagined - aspiration to separatism crystallized the tensions. In the meantime, since the second half of the nineteenth century the access to a mother tongue education rose to a priority for the elite of each national group. The restriction to a full access to schools teaching in the languages of the minorities or the implementation of assimilationist policies alienated the minorities and favored disregard.

Such a situation goes beyond the Hungarian and Romanian cases, but the delay observed in the attempt to set up a nation-state was due to the political instability, the belonging to multinational empires and the economic backwardness. Meanwhile, in Western Europe, the opposite phenomenon facilitated the process of homogenization with less turmoil. As a result, in Central and Eastern Europe, these attempts went at the expense of the other national communities and generated deeply antagonistic national projects.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Csanád Demeter, 'A székelyföldi oktatás', pp. 107-109.

⁶⁹ See for example: Lucian Boia, *Două secole de mitologie națională* [Two Centuries of National Mythology] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), pp. 69-75.

⁷⁰ Jenő Szűcs, *Les trois Europes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), pp. 86-111.