

Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century

Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth
to the Twentieth Century:
Volume 2

Edited by

Antonello Biagini and Giovanna Motta

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P U B L I S H I N G

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FROM PROTEST PETITIONS
TO PARLIAMENTARY ACTION:
THE ATTITUDE OF THE LEADERSHIP
OF THE NATIONALITIES IN HUNGARY
IN REGARDS TO THE MINISTER ÁGOSTON
TREFORT'S MAGYARIZATION POLICY¹

OVIDIU EMIL IUDEAN
AND OANA VALENTINA SORESCU

Despite the fact that more ample subjects of Magyarization through education and Minister Agoston Trefort's projects have been discussed by other Romanian historians, these approaches have not attempted to offer a comprehensive treatment of the way in which the lay leaders of the nationalities reacted to these issues. This paper focuses on the reactions of the Romanian representatives in the Budapest parliament. The activity of the lay political elite has been relegated to the periphery or even ignored in the previous studies that have discussed the attitude of the high clerics of the two Romanian churches in Hungary.

The signing of the *Ausgleich* in 1867 brought about significant changes in the political life of the Romanians in Hungary. During the dualist period, an increasing number of lay political leaders came to the fore, who, in cooperation with the clerical elite, directed their activity towards obtaining and defending the rights of the Romanian nation.

This study aims precisely to identify the evolution from a traditional political representation to an essentially modern one. From this perspective, the option of the Romanian political elite in Hungary to blend the older tactic of writing petitions with the more novel notion of parliamentary activity, which was more adequate to the political realities of the time, may be characterized as especially relevant. The reaction to

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the Minister Ágoston Trefort's educational laws constituted the first moment when these transformations became visible. The leaders of the two Romanian churches and the parliamentary representatives collaborated in order to counteract some of the provisions from the laws of 1879 and 1883, which they had assessed as contrary to the interests of the Romanian nation.

The tactic of writing petitions (also known as *petitionalism* in Romanian historiography) had been used by the leaders of the Romanian nation since the eighteenth century. It remained the main type of political action for the Romanians in the Austrian Empire throughout the constitutional period (Hitchins 1999, 28–77). During the dualist period, the role of the lay elite increased constantly owing to the activity of Romanian representatives in the Budapest parliament. Despite their common goal—that of contributing to the development of the Romanian nation—they were divided by their respective political orientation. Some adhered to the national program, while others believed it was more opportune to collaborate with the Hungarian political parties. Even these two orientations were further subdivided on account of divergent opinions. While the political leaders who had a national orientation were divided between activism and passivism, the members of the second category were inclined to give their support either to the opposition Hungarian parties, or to the governing political organization (Iudean 2012, 858–87). Taking these multiple divisions into account, it will be interesting to note the way in which different representatives chose to act when the Romanians' national interests were threatened.

During the second part of the nineteenth century, the Dual Monarchy experienced an accelerated process of modernization. One of its effects was the increased laicization of society. Within this context, but also wishing to align themselves with Western European tendencies, the Budapest governments became increasingly involved in the educational process (Brusanowski 2010, 294–95, 310–14). Thus, the church's traditional predominant role in schooling and education (at the beginning of the dualist period approximately 80 percent of the schools in Hungary were ecclesiastically supported) was increasingly rivaled by the state's interests. As a result, the education of new generations represented a key element in the attempt to exert control over society, a task, which had become desirable to the Hungarian governments (Sularea 2008, 123–88).

The ethnic and confessional realities in Hungary—and especially those in Transylvania and the Banat region—transformed the dispute between the church and the state into a nationally-charged argument. The Romanians, who made up the majority of the population in both regions,

regarded the government's intentions to become more deeply involved in confessional education as a grave threat to their ecclesiastical autonomy. Their attitude was easily understandable if one takes into account the fact that both the Greek-Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic churches were the only institutions which had their own Romanian organization.

The Budapest governments' educational projects were seen as Magyarization policies, which would have affected the other nationalities in Transleithania. Although deconfessionalization and the laicization of education were in accordance with the European *Zeitgeist*, and the confessional education was relatively archaic, the nationalities could not regard the state's modernizing role favorably. This attitude was caused by the excessive subordination of this role to the process of Magyarization, seen, after 1875, as an essential factor in the existence and development of Greater Hungary (Szasz 2002, 650–51).

Once the Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza assumed leadership of the government (1875–90), the educational policies of the Hungarian governments were characterized by a perpetual tendency towards Magyarization. Tisza aimed to integrate all of the nationalities in Transleithania into a single nation, the Hungarian one, through a series of educational and cultural measures. The first measures that helped to further this aim were the laws drafted when the minister for religion and education was Ágoston Trefort (1872–88) (Katus 2008, 123–25, 449–55).

This study will concern two of Trefort's legislative accomplishments, namely the *Law regarding the introduction of Hungarian in primary schools* (1879) and the *Law regarding secondary schools* (1883).

The first aspect which can be noted is the quantitative discrepancy between the two laws. The 1879 law was limited to only eight articles, while the latter piece of legislation included over seventy articles, which concerned different aspects of the educational problem. This discrepancy was decisive in determining the attitude of the Romanian leaders towards the two laws. While the first law was contested in its entirety, in the case of the second only certain articles were opposed.

The purpose of the first law was to introduce the Hungarian language as a subject in all primary schools, both those supported by the state and those that benefitted from ecclesiastical support. In addition, the law's provisions maintained the fact that the study of Hungarian was mandatory both for graduates in the science of pedagogy and for teachers who were already employed in primary schools on Hungarian territory (Puttkamer 2003, 187–209).

As far as the second law is concerned, we will only present some of its numerous provisions, namely those that sparked the discontent of the

nationalities in Hungary (especially that of the Romanians, the Transylvanian Saxons and the Serbs): firstly, the introduction of the study of the Hungarian language and Hungarian literature in all the eight levels of secondary education; secondly, the introduction of the abovementioned subject as a compulsory subject in the final examination at the end of the secondary level of education; thirdly, the increased involvement of the Ministry for Religion and Education in the activity of confessional secondary schools, with regard to the qualification of the teacher body, the final examinations and the school inspections (Puttkamer 2003, 180–86).

Both laws passed through both chambers of the Budapest parliament and, through their provisions, caused an ample reaction from the nationalities. We will now refer to the reaction of the Romanians in Hungary, and succinctly compare the approaches of the high clerics to those of the parliamentary representatives.

Even before the laws reached parliamentary debate, in both cases the Greek-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic metropolitans sent petitions to the Emperor-King Franz Josef and to the Budapest parliament. These petitions not only expressed the necessity of taking a strong position against these measures that affected the Romanians' interests but were also the result of nation-wide unrest, which had been sparked by the vigorous campaign in the Romanian press.

The Greek-Catholic petition was handed to the emperor on January 28/February 9, 1879, by the Metropolitan Ioan Vancea, while the Greek-Orthodox one was handed several days later on February 1/13, by the Metropolitan Miron Romanul.

Several arguments were used to ground this petition. Firstly, its unpedagogic character: the language was unknown; it was not spoken in the Romanian communities and therefore was difficult to learn to such a degree that it could later be used at an intermediate level. In addition to the fact that the school curriculum was unduly burdened by the introduction of a new subject, the law had a pronounced Magyarizing character: learning Hungarian became compulsory through legislative measures, thus leading to forced Magyarization. Thirdly, the school autonomy of the churches in Hungary was affected, especially in the case of the institutions where non-Hungarians were enrolled. This was caused by the provisions regarding teachers, who in four years needed to learn Hungarian to such an extent, that they could afterwards teach it, or risk losing their positions through the action of the competent institutions, subordinated to the Ministry of Religion and Education. Furthermore, the teachers lacked the financial and material means that would have allowed them to study Hungarian, which made this almost impossible. Thus, the Romanian teacher body was

extremely affected, which would have led to their replacement by non-Romanians of another confession. This law also significantly threatened and endangered the “ecclesiastical language”—Romanian, which had been recognized by the Holy See in 1853 as the official language for church services in the case of the Greek-Catholic Church (Păcățian 1910, 708–19). The emperor promised to take all of the needed measures, but this promise never materialized in the way the Romanians expected.

In 1883, both petitions were handed to the Chamber of Representatives in the Budapest parliament.

The arguments against the law were as follows: firstly, a significant limitation of educational autonomy for the two churches would take place, because the confessional authorities could no longer qualify secondary school teachers. Teachers who were already employed in secondary schools needed to pass new examinations, and the ministry had the right to appoint teachers for secondary schools. In addition, the possibility of drafting curricula and handbooks was severely limited, and complemented by the excessive involvement of the ministerial inspectors and commissaries in the internal matters of confessional secondary schools. This would have led to the establishment of educational standards that would have easily allowed the Hungarian authorities to close down the confessional secondary schools and to transform them into state-run institutions. Secondly, the Magyarizing character of the law: there was a pronounced danger that Hungarian would soon reach the status of exclusive language of teaching, which would limit the nationalities’ right to benefit from education in their own cultures (Păcățian 1913, 73–93).

In 1879, thirteen Romanian representatives were active in the Budapest parliament. Of these, nine were pro-governmental (on the side of the Liberal Hungarian Party), three were on the side of the opposition, namely the Party of Independence and the Party of Opposition, and one was a national representative, elected from the lists of the Romanian National Party in Banat. In 1883, only nine Romanian representatives were active. Of these, seven were adherents of the Liberal Magyar Party, one was a member of the Moderate Opposition Party, and one was a member of the National Romanian Party (Popovici and Iudean 2011, 127).

In 1879, a total of five Romanian representatives—three pro-governmental and two members of the opposition—joined the Serb and Saxon representatives who spoke in the session of the Budapest parliament against the law. Although several differences were noticeable, especially in regards to the vehemence with which the provisions of this law were combated—the representatives of the Hungarian opposition were especially vocal in this respect—the discontent and arguments invoked are

strikingly similar. They form several patterns, among which the most important were the limitation of ecclesiastical autonomy; the imminent breakout of dissensions between the nationalities in Hungary, which would make their cohabitation even more difficult. The cohabitation between the Romanians and the Hungarians benefitted both nations, and was especially supported by the pro-governmental faction. Moreover, the support given to the constitutional right to petition (regarding the approach taken by the two churches) and the condemnation of the Hungarian press that had qualified these petitions as unpatriotic and illegal instigated Hungarian public opinion against the Romanians. In addition, the provisions of the law of nationalities from 1868 (which allowed for an entire series of rights, including in the field of education) were neither respected nor applied (*Telegraful Român* [Sibiu], April 26, 1879; Păcățian 1910, 746–815).

The law was also heavily criticized from a pedagogic standpoint and seen as lacking applicability. The representatives argued that children would not be able to learn Hungarian to the necessary extent because of low attendance but mostly because they would have no one to practice with outside of school, as they lived in Romanian communities. Furthermore, teachers who already worked in primary education and who did not know Hungarian did not have enough financial means to participate in courses necessary to learn Hungarian. Their social status was a major obstacle, as their low salaries forced them to become involved in agricultural activities, which would have been neglected in the event of attending courses in Hungarian and would have thus reduced their income even further. A counterexample to the efficacy of the law that was brought up was the unsuccessful attempt made by the Austrian authorities to impose the learning of German in the territories of the empire's former military border (*Telegraful Român* [Sibiu], June 2, 1879; Păcățian 1910, 746–815).

From a similar perspective, it was argued that the time spent studying Hungarian would have deprived the primary school pupils of gaining more applied and necessary knowledge.

Despite these concerns, a great part of the Romanian intelligentsia, who were fluent in the language, accepted the study of Hungarian at a secondary school level.

However, the introduction of Hungarian in confessional primary schools was seen as inadequate, as the government did nothing to support these institutions materially. The lack of moderation manifested by the Hungarian political leaders was criticized: they were compared to the generation that came to the fore in the first decade after 1867, when

moderate personalities such as Eötvös Józef și Deák Ferenc assumed leadership. Lastly, the Magyarizing underpinnings of the law were noted by all of the five representatives, implicitly as well as explicitly (*Telegraful Român* [Sibiu], June 7, 1879; Păcățian 1910, 746–815).

The discontent caused by the law's provisions, as well as the position taken by the Independence Party's club caused the resignation of its vice-president, the Romanian representative George Pop of Basesti (*Gazeta Transilvaniei* [Brașov], February 27, 1879).

In 1883, only three Romanian representatives, all of them pro-governmental, spoke in the parliament's session. Their positions increasingly reflected their political orientation.

The first, Alexandru Roman, raised several clearly expressed counter-arguments to the law: he contested the composition of the commission that had approved the project—the representatives of the nationalities (Saxons, Serbians and Romanians) who could have opposed this project had been excluded from this committee, as well as those who were part of a confession that the project directly affected (Greek-Catholic, Greek-Oriental and Lutheran). In addition, he supported the introduction of the study of Hungarian both in the seventh and eighth levels of secondary education and the establishment of this subject as a part of the final examination. While criticizing the excessive involvement of the ministerial authorities in the internal matters of the confessional secondary schools, he emphasized that there was a danger of Magyarization if some of the law's provisions were put into effect. Moreover, he argued that the great number of Hungarian classes—thirty-one per week—compared to those of Romanian, sixteen per week, was extremely exaggerated (Păcățian 1913, 99–115).

The second representatives, Iosif Gall, had numerous interventions during the debate concerning the change in the formulation of certain articles. His professional background as a lawyer and his political experience led him to attempt to change the details of certain provisions, rather than to condemn the legislative initiative as a whole. He argued for the maintaining of the church's right to appoint teachers in confessional secondary schools—a proposal that was ultimately accepted by the parliament, and of its right to deal with their pedagogic qualifications. He also supported the subordination of the ecclesiastical and confessional authorities, from an educational perspective, directly to the Ministry for Religion and Education, and not to high-level school inspectors. Moreover, he reasoned that it was necessary to establish clear rules to regulate the conditions wherein a secondary school could be legally closed down by the authorities and the necessity that individual blame should not

reflect on the entire student or teacher body in the event of serious deviations. These two emendations were not accepted by the parliament (Păcățian 1913, 115–19).

The third representative, Ioan Missici, expressed his complete support for the entire project, which he saw as a means to aid in the social, economic and cultural development of the Romanian nation (*Telegraful Român* [Sibiu], May 22, 1883).

Beyond the MPs parliamentary activity and the actions of the high clergy of the two Romanian churches, the law also caused ample street protests in numerous Transylvanian cities where the Romanian population held the majority. Although these came as a natural reaction, caused by profound discontent, the “national agitations” endangered the MPs’ activity. The ever-increasing manifestations brought about the reaction of the radical Hungarian circles. Through the press and the parliamentary representatives, they pressured the government to resist the solicitations of the Romanian MPs. The ensuing situation risked compromising the latter’s previous efforts. As a result, and because of the insistence of the Hungarian central authorities, five Romanian MPs who shared pro-governmental views drew up an “Appeal” through which they asked the protesters to renounce their actions. They argued that the concessions they had obtained through parliamentary action—the maintaining of Romanian as a teaching language in Romanian secondary schools, the continued right that teachers be appointed by the appropriate ecclesiastical forums, the limitation of the government representatives’ involvement in the maturity examinations, which somewhat ensured the preservation of confessional autonomy—had been extremely significant and that they were endangered by the continued protests. The Greek-Orthodox metropolitan from Sibiu, Miron Romanul, joined the efforts of the Romanian MPs by drafting circulars containing similar requests and addressed to the parishes in Transylvanian and Banat. The Romanian nationally-inclined press however staunchly criticized both the “Appeal” and the circulars, and argued for continued street protests while condemning the attitude of the signatories of the aforementioned documents (*Luminatoriul* [Timișoara], April 14, 1883).

It may be stated that there was a pronounced difference in the way the Romanian representatives reacted to the two laws. While in 1879, all of the representatives who expressed themselves in the parliament were against the law, in 1883 there was a greater diversity of opinion: very few vehemently protested, some protested moderately, while others were in favor of the law.

The explanation for this fact can be found in the different political orientations of the Romanian representatives during the two parliamentary cycles. While during the 1878–81 cycle there was a greater diversity of political orientations, in the following cycle, from 1881 to 1884, the liberal-governmental current dominated the ranks of the Romanian representatives. In addition, the 1879 law's more pronounced Magyarizing underpinnings may account for this situation.

We must also observe the collaboration between the clerical and the lay elite in regards to the 1879 law, as well as its weakening in 1883. The withdrawal of some of the most experienced and charismatic Romanian political leaders from the Hungarian political after 1881 certainly led to such a situation. The adoption of passivism (the Romanian voters' boycotting of parliamentary elections) in 1881 was the main factor behind this withdrawal.

One thousand eight hundred eighty-one marked the beginning of a new period from the perspective of parliamentary representatives, as the majority was now part of the Hungarian pro-governmental current. This aspect was readily visible in the debate of important laws that were significant to the educational and confessional interests of the Romanian nation, when the higher clerics of the Romanian Churches lacked the support of favorable parliamentary speeches.

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