Made in Paris? Contested regions and poltical regionalism during and after peacemaking: Székelyföld and the Banat in a comparative perspective[*]

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Asking someone in Hungary about the Treaty of Trianon would most probably yield an answer close to a lament. Something about injustice, intolerable loss, mourning, truncation and amputation, incredible suffering of ethnic kin beyond the borders set with the treaty. While most people would certainly use this tone, rooted in the immediate aftermath of the WWI when it was first used consciously, hardly any would believe if they were told that the same tropes, metaphors and emotions dominated debates in the Romanian parliament throughout the 1920s. Romania was, after all, the „winner of Trianon", the triumphant neighbor, the nation that still today defiantly celebrate the anniversary of December 1, only to frustrate Hungarians. Maybe, also most Romanian would be astounded to learn that Romanian political parties in the 1920s sought scapegoats for an alleged national tragedy, warned about the catastrophe that befell a part of the nation, invoked truncation and injustice when they debated who were responsible for the loss of a third of the Banat.

Such unexpectedly similar emotions, however surprising they are, serve only as a secondary motive for taking two symbolically important geographic areas, the Székelyland and the Banat, and compare how the diplomatic struggle for these regions around 1919-1920 related to the phenomenon of regionalism. The making of nation states in 1918-1920 was, after all, a series of decisions made over the affiliation of regions with states. These were sometimes simple geographic entities, or functional regions defined by economics and communication lines, but some of them had dense histories, symbolic significance for certain national projects, and the people in such regions often nurtured a sense of community within. However, the broad claims in the period mostly based on the idea of national self-determination, and the wide array of arguments used - ethnic, historic, economic,

strategic etc. – makes it handy to interpret struggles over such areas predominantly as part of a uniform national struggle, obscuring the specifics and peculiarities of each region.

Both the Banat and the Székelyland are cases, in which people were mobilized within and outside the region, nd throughout this attempt emphasis was laid onsomething that could be called regional peculiarity. Both cases figured strongly in the debates over the new boundaries of Hungary and Romania. Therefore, I argue, they offer useful insights in the way the peace-making affected, even transformed regionalism, enhanced the potential of the Székely elite to push back against attempts of subordination from Budapest, and made interwar Banat regionalism more dependent on Bucharest, despite the permanent confrontation of self-claimed Banat regionalists with the Old Kingdom elites.

I will start with outlining the basics of peacemaking, including the typical arguments of the contestants, followed by an analysis of the different forms of popular mobilization within and for the regions. Finally, I will connect the events of the tumultuous years with its afterlife, pointing out how the struggle affected the tenets of regionalism and how the debates were later used by different actors to pose competing claims on being the true representatives of the region.

Red lines, white spots: peace-making and arguments for a new boundary

The collapse of the dualist Monarchy was of breathtaking speed after the Bulgarian armistice was signed on 29 September 1918. While Franchet d'Espérey's troops moved to the north, pushing back a gradually disorganizing Austro-Hungarian army,[1] national councils was formed in capital cities of the Monarchy and its provinces. In Hungary, István Tisza admitted military defeat on 17 October 1918, and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod announced in the lower house of the Hungarian parliament that only the Romanian National Party represented Hungary's Romanians and was entitled to decide over their fate., A Hungarian National Council was formed on 24 October 1918, and a Romanian one - on 30

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[1] Hannes Leidinger: Der Untergang der Habsburgermonarchie. Haymon Verlag, Innsbruck, 2017. E-book, Loc, 4042-4193.

October, both councils invoking the idea of national-self-determination. When the Monarchy concluded an armistice on 3 November, the state itself did not exist anymore and Romania's second entry in the war on 10 November found no real resistance in the extinct Habsburg army.

The slogan of the day was national self-determination, and national councils acted as the sole representatives of millions of people in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Prague, Martin, Budapest, Arad, competing for influence and power with workers' and peasants' councils too.[2] While advancing armies pushed forward to acquire the territories their governments claimed, minorities also erected their national bodies: Jews in Cluj, Sighetul Marmatiei, and Timisoara, Saxons in Sibiu and Kronstadt, Germans in Timişoara and Budapest. At the end of the year, Serbian troops settled on a long demarcation line that left in their possession even more than the new South Slav kingdom saw as its rightful share, including the Banat, and the Romanian army reached the boundary of the historic province of Transylvania. The Ruling Council (Consiliul Dirigent) acted as the government of these territories, whose annexation to Romania was declared at Alba Iulia on 1 December.

A curious moment of the process of imperial dissolution was when important dignitaries and politicians of the Hungarian state set up in Budapest a Székely National Council on 9 November. A few days later, this body was transformed into a broader representative institution, although its members, like Miklós Bánffy, István Bethlen or Dénes Sebess, were not necessarily of Székely origin. The Council adopted a plan to erect an independent Székely Republic, tied to Hungary in foreign policy and customs union, which was to be represented at the peace conference too. It also organized a mass demonstration in Târgu Mureș on 28 November, but the Romanian authorities soon arrested the key figure of the movement in Székelyland, Árpd Paál, deputy lord-lieutenant of

[2] Hatos Pál: Az elátkozott köztársaság. Jaffa, Budapest, 2018. 101–120., 128–131. 172–186.; Hjdu Tibor: A magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1968,: , Gábor Egry: Negotiating Post-Imperial Transitions: Local Societies and Nationalizing States in East Central Europe. In: Paul, Miller; Claire, Morelon (szerk.) Embers of Empire. Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918.
New York – Oxford,: Berghahn Books, 2019, 15-42.

Udvarhely county.[3] Nevertheless, the situation on the ground remained tenuous,[4] and the Budapest-based organizations conducted propaganda internationally to obstruct the annexation of the region to Romania.

While opposition regarding the Székelyland with its predominantly Hungarian population (well over 90 percent of the inhabitants of Csík, Udvarhely, Háromszék, and Maros-Torda counties) was easy to understand, the opposition regarding the envisioned future of the Banat within Greater Romania was difficult to digest in Bucharest. The Entente promised the whole region to Bucharest according to the secret treaty of 1916, but in November 1918 the area was occupied by Serbian troops, and Serbia laid claim to the whole region too.

When the peace conference opened,[5] both regions of the Székelyland and the Banat counted as contested ones. However, despite the undeniable Hungarian character of the Székelyland, none of the decision-makers wanted to retain it with Hungary, its future being questioned only later, with the arrival of the Hungarian delegation in January 1920 in the French capital. The Hungarians made a series of proposals, essentially all rejected, but they still tried to make an argument over the future of the Székelyland outside Romania. The Banat, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan, urban and much more developed than the Székely areas, was a more immediate flashpoint, and the issue was settled well before the Hungarian treaty was even drawn up. After months of diplomatic wrangling the conference drew a line and divided the region between the two rival states.[6] The mostly agrarian western plains were annexed to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the fertile north, the

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[3] Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza. Tanulmányok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetéből. Pro print, Csíkszereda, 2013. 62.

[4] Pál Judit: Fősipnok és prefektusok 1918 – 1919-ben. A közigazgatási átmenet kérdése Erdélyben. Századok, 2018/6. 1179–1214., 1195–1198.

[5] Margaret Macmillan: Paris 1919. Six Months that Changed the World. Random House, New York, 2003..

[6] Ionela Moscivici: Ionela Moscovici: Banatul in aşteptarea păcii. Premisele unei misiuni franceze. *Analele Banatului,* 2010. 241–250.;Ionela-Felicia Moscovici: La France et le Banat entre 1916-1919. Les convulsions de la guarre et de la paix. Thése Doctorale, Université du Strasbourg, 2013.; Margaret Macmillan: Paris 1919., 120–135.

industrial south and mountainous east went to Romania. Thus, the entire Székelyland was incorporated into Romania, later becoming a so-called "cultural zone", an area to (re)conquerthrough energetic Romanianizaton policies,[7] while the whole Banat became a divided area and a symbol of Romanian failure at the peace conference.

What were the most important arguments, presented by diplomats at the conference, and how they reflected the alleged uniqueness of the regions, how these regions were constructed in Paris? Regarding the Székelyland, its existence at the center of Romania's national territory was an accident. Given that, even the plans least favorable to Romania has drawn the boundary hundreds of kilometers westward,[8] its possession by Romania was never in doubt among Romanian politicians, and the Romanian delegation did not need an elaborated argumentation to justify its claim on this specific zone of the country. It was more the general arguments – spread of Romanians, strategic necessities, communication line – in favor of the unity of the country that simply implied that this geographic zone naturally belongs to Greater Romania too. When it came to mentioning the Székelys, the Romanians carefully distinguished them from Hungarians (although admitting that they are closely related with Hungarians). The memorandum, submitted on 8 February 1919, which presented statistical data on the ethnicity of Transylvania's population, argued that, since the region had strong economic ties with surrounding Romanian areas, its inhabitants would prefer Romania over Hungary.[9] While Romani easily prevailed in this regard, the Hungarian population, despite all its alleged favorable views on the new country,remained a thorn in the flash., The discomfort they caused for Bucharest was manifested the best in a provision of the Minority Treaty, originally

[7] Irina Livezeanu: Cultural Politics Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle 1918–1930. Ithaca–London, Cornell University Press, 1995, 138–142.

[8] Ignác Romsics: The dismantling of historic Hungary : the Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920. Boulder, Co., East European Monographs, 2002.

[9] Zeidler Miklós (ed.): Trianon. Osiris, Budapest, 2001, 52–58.

rejected by the Romanian government as unacceptable violation of sovereignty, that provided for educational autonomy of the Székely and Saxon communities.[10]

as regards to the borders, Hungarians in Paris argued in the same vein and emphasized the natural economic, hydrological and cultural unity of the Carpathian Basin and Hungary, the defender of Europe a necessary cornerstone of European peace. No specific proposals regarding the Székely region were made.[11] While somewhat surprising, not to focus on this manifest violation of the idea of national self-determination was certainly logical, as the Hungarian delegation seriously considered it realistic to achieve a plebiscite on the whole territory, thus it did not aim at preserving specific zones with more adjusted arguments.[12] However, in a separate note (Nr. VIII.) of the peace delegation(, it raised the issue of Transylvania, but again, without singling out the Székelyland. Instead, they proposed a comprehensive reorganization of a semi-independent Transylvania (loosely part of a Hungarian state) into autonomous regions, which was basically Oszkár Jászi's plan from late 1918.[13] The Székely "anomaly" was only scarcely mentioned,[14] the Hungarian delegates putting more effort in convincing the peace conference to decide for the returning of the Hungarian inhabited strip along the new borders.

The case of the Banat brought to the fore strikingly similar official argumentations, and the region – despite never having been a proper political entity contrary to the Principality of Transylvania –was listed separately among the provinces Romania claimed. (Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, Maramureș.) A separate section of the above-mentioned memorandum detailed the official argumentation, starting from the assumption that the "Banat is not a geographic name, rather reality, a proper geographic unit and a real province in political sense, which is an indivisible unity today just as it was

[10] Lucian Leustean: România, Ungaria și Tratatul de la Trianon 1918–1920. Polirom, Iași, 2002. 128–140.
[11] Zeidler Miklós: Trianon… 110–128., 136–145.
[12] Zeidler Milós (ed.), Trianon 134–135.
[13] Zeidler Miklós: Trianon… 128 – 129., 131.
[14] Zeidler Miklós (ed.), 135.

throughout the history."[15] Nevertheless, the Romanian arguments, presented by Ion. I. C. Brătianu, aimed primarily at forcing the Great Powers to acknowledge the still binding nature of the Bucharest treaty of 1916.[16] It was his primary consideration and claim, all other points were of secondary importance. Still, Brătianu elaborated the uniquely unitary character of the Banat, mentioning the hundreds of years presence of a Romanian majority, the complementary nature of the Banat's subregions in economic terms, the importance of the unified control over the waterways provided by the three rivers on its borders and the smaller ones (Timiş, Bega) within, and tried to alleviate the fear that Romanian presence – almost opposite to Belgrade – would mean a serious strategic threat to the South Slav state.[17] The ethnic composition of the region was mentioned too, first arguing that Romanians constitute the majority, and also populate the western areas, and second, with the rather astounding claim that, if the Hungarians and Germans would face a choice between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS) and Romania, they would opt for the latter.[18]

His opponents, the South Slav and the Hungarian delegates, did not make strong and specific arguments regarding the Banat. The Serbian claims were justified by such arguments, as ethnicity, historic tradition of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the region, economic benefits of having fertile plains to provide food and raw material for Belgrade, and later, after the South Slavs moderated their demands to about one third of the region, strategic considerations – a significant distance between the capital, Belgrade, and the border – were emphasized.[19]

The Hungarians, similarly to the case of the Székelyland, made an argument about the unitary nature of the country, the Banat being one of its important and well developed parts. They also asserted – in a strange contradiction to Brătianu's assertion they did not know about – the willingness of the Banat

[15] Zeidler Miklós: Trianon… 56.
[16] Leustean: 53.
[17] Zeidler: 56–58., Gulyás László: Közdelem egy multietnikus régióért, avagy a Bánság felosztásáank (1918 – 1920) probelamtíkája multidsizciplináris megközelítésben. Múltunk, 2018/3, 150–205. 169–173., Ionela Moscovici: La France et le Banat… 293–305., 312–334.
[18] Gulyás: op. cit. 171.
[19] Gulyás László: 176., 188., Moscovici, La Farence et la Banat, 135., 394.

Germans to side with Hungary and Hungarians in case of a plebiscite. Thus, they also questioned the ethnic arguments of the Romanians, pointing out that the Germans and the Hungarians formed together the majority in the region.[20]

Masses and memoranda: mobilization within and without

Whereas diplomatic arguments and documents on all sides refrained from using the peculiarity of the Banat and the Székelyland as a strong argument in favor of either one of the claims, both geographic zones were palpably regions with a sense of difference present among the people, although vastly different ones. The Székelyland was a distant, mountainous area, secluded from the center of Transylvania and not easily accessible, apart from its southern part close to Brasov. The Banat was a fertile plain in the west and the north and a mountain zone in the east and south, which held rich deposits of coal and iron – the preconditions of an industrial base. Thus, in the Székely areas mountain agriculture was the dominant economic sector, with light industry (glass making, lumber mills, stitching within households, tobacco) developing in the south, and the exploitation of natural reserves (mainly stone) all over the area. The largest city, Târgu Mureș was a developing industrial center, but the small countryside towns were often just marketplaces and centers of secondary education.[21] By contrast, within the Banat there was a southeastern industrial zone with steelworks and mines, forestry and lumber making, which attracted a significant number of immigrant workforce. In the north and west agriculture was the basic activity, but the richness of the land soon helped the emergence of food processing industry in the form of large factories. Finally, the unofficial capital and the largest city of the Region, Timișoara was a real hub of commerce, industry and transportation. Its labor force was around 7000 persons, all working in large factories ranging from machinery production to chemical industries. The city had its own stock exchange and port on the Bega channel.

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[20] Zeidler Miklós (ed.), Trianon, 122–123., 134–135.
[21] Pál Judit: Városfejlődés a Székelyföldön 1750–1914. pro Print, Csíkszereda, 2003.

It is thus hardly surprising that the society of the two regions was also significantly different. However, the most important in this regard was probably not the higher number of industrial labour and the breadth of an educated, modern middle-class – many of the late immigrant to the region – in the Banat. What made the Székelys peculiar was a long past of feudal privileges that set them apart from the regular nobility of Hungary and Transylvania and was reimagined as a collective "feudal nation".[22] The privileges were was only abolished in 1848, with Székelys' enthusiastic embrace of the Hungarian nation and nationalism, but it was still a vivid memory of that time.[23] Furthermore, the erstwhile separate status was often legitimized by a history of separate descent and ethnic difference, the Székelys being descendants of the Huns, but still the best and most authentic Hungarians.[24] At the turn of the 20th century this reasoning was semi-officially adopted, when large scale government-sponsored development projects started. One of the justification was the importance to salvage the Székelys, the best Hungarians, from being gradually dissolved into the sea of the Romanians, or being forced out of their backward homeland.[25]

Such a strong and focused sense of historical peculiarity was absent with regard to the Banat. The area was reconquered from the Ottoman Empire in 1716, and until 1778 – administered directly from Vienna as a laboratory of enlightened absolutist development policies, the Banat thus becoming the destination of successive waves of colonization.[26] The new administration had overlaid almost

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[22] According to the constitution of the principality of Transylvania, its privileged groups were divided into three *nationes* (feudal nations)? Saxons (German-speaking Lutherans) and Székelys both with collective privileges, and Hungarian nobles living outside these regions with individual privileges. All three group sent a specific number of delegates to the legislative body, the diet.

[23] Hermann Gusztáv Mihály–Orbán Zsolt, Csillagösvény és görönygös út. Mítosz és történelem a székelység tudatában.. Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, Kolozsvár, 2018. 227–358.; Egyed Ákos, Erdély 1848 – 1849. Pallas Akadémia, Csíkszereda, 1998.; Hermann Gusztáv Mhály: Náció és nemzet. Székely rendi nacionalizmus és magyar nemzettudat 1848-ig. Pro Print, Csíkszereda, 2003

[24] Hermann Gusztáv Mihály: Náci és nemzte.; Hermann Gusztáv Mihály – Orbán Zsolt, Csillagösvény…

[25] Balaton Petra – Reisz T. Csaba: A székelyföldi ipari akció. Levéltári Közlemények, 2006/2, 55–122.

[26] Irina Marin: *Contested Frontiers in the Balkans: Ottoman and Habsburg Rivalries in Eastern Europe*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2012.

everything that had remained from the medieval Banat, nevertheless, a common regional identity was not fostered. Most intellectuals opted for the integration into either Hungarian or Romanian national movements, thus re-telling the history of the region as part of either Hungarian or Romanian history.[27] The Romanian version emphasized the Dacian roots of the territory and the long existence of Romanians there. At one point, it also picked up the history of the military frontier with its single Romanian regiment with its headquarters in Caransebeș. Politically, the region became a battlefield between the pro-Hungarian Romanians, the Romanian national activist, the protagonists of the liberal Hungarian governing parties – often local large landowners – and their opposition, the latter being mainly composed of more recent immigrants, active in modern professions that flourished due to the richness of the region.[28]

At the end of the war, the Banat and the Székelyland were scenes of customary revolutionary mobilization against the state administration and for the establishment of national councils. The mobilization, often bearing a violent character, occurred first in the larger cities, being later brought from there to the villages.[29] The Banat was, however, the scene of a peculiar phenomenon. On 31 October 1918, Otto Roth, a Social Democratic lawyer, announced the establishment of a People's Council and "declared" the Republic of Banat.[30] Roth, who henceforth wore the title of People's Commissioner, referenced the peculiarity of the Banat by saying: "We showed the world, we showed

[27] Bálint Varga: Writing Imperial History in the Age of High Nationalism: Imperial Historians on the Fringes of the Habsburg Monarchy, European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire, 24:1, 80-95, Varga Bálint: In the Middle of the Nation, on the Margins of the Academia: Historiography in Banat in the Long 19th Century. In Irina Vainovski-Mihai (ed.), New Europe College Yearbook 2012–2013, 305–340.

[28] Ovidiu Emil Iudean, From Budapest to Bucharest. The Parliamentary Elite of the Banat bfore and after the Great War. Banatica, 25, 375–389. Jakabffy Elemér: Krassó-Szörény vármegye története. Különös tekintettel a nemztiségi kérdésre. Magyar Kisebbség, 1940, 382–398. esp. 386–393.

[29] Hajdu Tibor: A magyarországi, 92 – 103., Hatos Pál: Az elátkozott köztársaság, 172–186.; Ionela Moscovici: Violence Variables in the Bana tat the End of World War I. Banatica 22, 277–293.; Andreea Dăncilă Ineoan, Reconsiderations of the Banatian Revolution from the Aftermath of the Great War, Banatica 25, 417–430.

[30] It was rather a misunderstood telegram or telephone communication from Budapets stating that the Republic was already announced in the capital. See Konstiitutierung des Banater Volksrates in Temeswar. Temeswarer Zeitung, November 1, 1918.

our later descendants, that the people of the Banat and of Temesvár could fight for the republic and a better future without [shedding] blood."[31] He portrayed the region as a multiethnic one, in which national differences were of secondary importance.

But it was a rather curious conceptualization, as most people in the region had a more limited horizon than Roth, whose mental map was rooted in a multiethnic movement as organized labour was composed of people often moving from one place to another. Villagers and even inhabitants of smaller urban centers thought in different terms. When a few months later it came to the reconfiguration of administrative units (counties), local inhabitants revealed that their immediate environment was where they felt most at home. The proposal of the inhabitants of Belinț is a case in point.[32] Around the end of the war the village was transferred from Timiș to the so-called Lugoj county (set up by the French occupation authorities in March 1919), a change that alleviated serious burden of the locals, but subsequently was to reversed by the Romanian administration. In a petition, it was argued that before the first administrative rearrangements they had to visit Timișoara with administrative matters, that was much further than Lugoj. In fact, the villagers had vivid connections in Lugoj and their economic activity was centered around the city, while Timișoara was only a distant administrative center.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the mobilization of masses in Banat (at least of those who were not active in the widespread violence), apart from Roth's attempt – one that never really succeeded in unifying the national councils of the Banat – occurred through Romanian, German, Serbian and Hungarian national councils. In the Székely region non-Hungarian councils were a rarity, in the Banat, however, it was the rule, and the Romanian bodies politely and diplomatically rejected any attempt to involve them with the Hungarian state administration, apart from co-operation for the

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[31] Transl. by Christopher Wendt, see: Christopher Wendt: "Hungary – Republic: The King has Abdicated." A Report from Timișoara/Temesvár – November 1, 1918. https://1918local.eu/100-years-later/

[32] ANIC CD Directia Adm. Gen. Dosar 5/1919. 49. f.

preservation of public order.[33] But their time only struck after the withdrawal of Serbian troops, and after the French occupation authorities replaced the Hungarian administration of the so-called Lugoj county with a Romanian one, in June 1919.[34]

The Székely National Council was established on 9 November 1918 outside the region, in Budapest. It was first the endeavour of a few, dubious figures, who wanted to use the initiative for restoring their position in politics. Conflicts with a more influential group of politicians eventually led to the secession of a group, while the main body remained under the control of the latter, and their experts, Miklós Bánffy, Dénes Sebes, István Bethlen, Gábor Ugron, Elemér Jancsó among others,[35] wished to use the idea of national self-determination to savage the eastern parts of Hungary. It did not remain, however, confined to Budapest; Székely National Councils were set up in many cities outside the region, even as far as Sightul Marmației.[36] In this specific case, the initiator was from Miercurea Ciuc, the vice-president being active in other Székely societies that mushroomed all over Hungary after the so-called Székely Congress in 1902, where a large-scale development program for the region was initiated.[37]

The Council's activity was carried out mainly in Budapest. There were some demonstrations in the Székelyland before the arrival of Romanian troops. The assembly in Gheorgheni was greeted by Gábor Ugron, former minister of interior and royal commissioner for the reconstruction of Transylvania. its declaration addressed to the public announced that the Székelys again must fulfil their millennial role of defending Hungary's eastern borders. The politician called for a new Székely

[33] Hajdu Tibor: A magyarországi, 103., Jakabffy Elemér–Páll György: A bánsági magyarság húsz éve 1918–1938., Stádium, Budapest, 18–19.
[34] Jakabffy Elemér–Páll György: A bánsági magyarság, 30–32.
[35] Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza,58–60. Primipilus: A Székely Hadosztály és a Székely Nemzeti Tanács. Új Magyar Szemle, 1920/3., 272–281.
[36] Máramarosi Független Újság, November 23., 1918. 1–2.
[37] Balaton Petra: Balaton Petra: A székely társadalom önszerveződése: a székely társaságok (I.-II), *Korunk*, 2010/1. 78 – 85., 2010/2. 71–77.

people's assembly where the leaders would give guidance.[38] But when it came to organizing, on 28 November, a mass demonstration against the advance of Romanian troops to Târgu Mureș, the local Hungarian National Council, which leaders, unlike the Székely National Council leaders, were from Oszkár Jászi's Civic Radical party, protested for fear of violence and thus achieved a scaling down of the event. They were also suspicious of how Bethlen and his peers "abused" the term Székely which – as they insisted – raised the specter of detaching Székelys from Hungarians[39]

The Székely National Council was also active in contesting the claims of the Romanian National Council and the Alba Iulia assembly on 1 December 1918. Mid-November they issued a declaration which contended the Romanian historical arguments, most notably the thesis of Romanian continuity. It also proclaimed that Transylvania was for four centuries the common homeland of Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys, therefore, any arrangement that would have violated Hungary's territorial integrity was rejected.[40] A reply to the Alba Iulia Declaration was drafted, the text being much more concrete in detailing Székely specificities, although its reasoning about the inviolability of Hungary's territorial integrity as an economic, cultural and geographic necessity was basically the same as in the previous document. A clear distinction between the Székelys and the Hungarians was made, postulating that the Székelys were for a thousand year detached from their mother country, although preserving their Hungarianness. The annexation of the whole province of Transylvania to Romania would lead to the extinction of the thousand years old Székely culture and its special development, even if the promise of autonomy would have been realized, was emphasized in the text. The Romanian territorial demands made the secession of Székelyföld from Hungary inescapable. Only an independent nation could avoid being incorporated into Romania; based on this

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[38] A székelyek nemzetgyűlése. Magyarország, November 22, 1918. 2. The tone, style, and the pharses used (the Székelyland conceived as the „Hungarian California) suggest that the declaration was drafted by Ugron's long time collaborator and supporter, P. Arthur Vákár, a journalist from Gheorgheni. See Egry Gábor: Regionalizmus, erdélyiség, szupremácia. Az Erdélyi Szövetség és Erdély jövője, 1913–1918, *Századok*, 2013/1. 3–32. 27.

[39] Fodor János: Impériumváltás Marosvásárhelyen 1918–1922. Múltunk 2016/2., 148–186., esp. 158–160.

[40] A székelyek szava. Az Újság, November 26, 1918. 3.

argument, the Székely National Council handed an ultimatum to the Hungarian government: if there

was no chance to retain Transylvania, the Council was to proclaim an independent Székely Republic.[41]

The plan for an independent Székely republic was elaborated by Árpád Paál, deputy lord-lieutenant

of Odorheiu county and chairman of the local Székely National Council.[42] Paál outlined a curious

construct, betraying that its author was an adept of Jászi's civic radicalism and progressivism, thus

combininf his social ideas with the Hungarian national idea.[43] Paál's Székely Republic was imagined as

a communitarian state with the dominance of public property and a state managed economy, private

initiatives were to be reduced to the family sphere, and a youth labour service would have provided

the workforce for state infrastructure projects. It is important to note that Paál based the legitimacy

of a Székely republic both on historical and geopolitical arguments. The historical ones were the

usual suspects: the unique Székely history, although Paál added that the Székelys, whose territory

was a theater of operations since 1916, suffered more during the war than other Hungarians. In

geopolitical terms, Paál drew an analogy with Switzerland, a country he understood as a necessary

neutral zone at an important boundary between four major powers. He argued that the Székelyland

had the same function in Eastern Europe, mitigating threats from the East, especially in the light of

the dual threat, that of the Communism and the "yellow Asian race". For him, the Székelys were

especially adept to ward it off, due to their traditional communitarianism and Asian origins.

The first phase of the activity of the Székely National Council ended with the proclamation of the

Hungarian Soviet Republic. In early 1919, the Council still issued a few declarations, among which

discouraging the Székelys of any armed action against the Romanian occupation was the most

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[41] Székely Köztársaság. 8 Órai Újság, December 7, 1918. 6. See also Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza, 58–60.

[42] Paál Árpád: Emlékirat a semleges, független székely államról. Magyar Kisebbség, 2003/2-3., 120–133., Bárdi Nándor: Otton és haza, 60–63.

[43] On Paál see Horváth Sz. Ferenc: Utak, tévutak, zsákutcák. Paál Árpád két világháború közti politikai nézeteiről. In: Balázs Ablonczy – Csilla Fedinecz (eds.): Folyamatok a változásban. A hatalomváltások társadalmi hatásai Közép-Európában a XX. században. Teleki László alapítvány, Budapest, 2005., 117-160.

important.[44] It was about that time, when the activity of Romanian political activity in most of the Banat was also stalled by the Serbian authorities,[45] only to restart around June 1919. But in the meantime, especially in late May and early June, a series of demonstrations and assemblies were organized by cultural and political associations and always with the support of the administration in Transylvania and the Old Kingdom to protest the partition of the region.[46]

The protests were similar, few local dignitaries delivering speeches in which certain arguments in favor of the Romanian claims were outlined. In this way, they offer a vivid picture of how the Banat was constructed for an audience which had only very limited personal experience of the region and the Romanians inhabiting the territory. For example, at the assembly held on 24 May 1919 in Ploesti,[47] a professor of a local secondary school gave a speech, which started with the assertion of the indissoluble geographic and economic unity of the Banat. He also gave a detailed historical overview, which was not always part of the script used elsewhere. The historical argument asserted Romanian continuity since before the Roman conquest and aimed at countering the Serbian historical arguments, not these of the Hungarians. The Dacians (i.e. the Geto-Dacian civilization) managed to build a state that was as developed as the Roman Empire, and later Traian set out for his conquest of Dacia through the Banat, resulting in the early Latinization. The Romanians preserved their civilization throughout the *Völkerwanderung*[48] that lasted until 1326, when the Hungarian king Károly Róbert conquered the Banat and had not found a single Slav there. The whole Ottoman era was omitted and the speaker continued with the arrival of Serbs in 1690, with Arsenije, the Patriarch of Ipek in exile. A scene for often violent clashes and oppression of the Romanians within the Orthodox church was set up. Although Emperor Joseph II admitted that the Romanians were the

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[44] A székelyek a magyar államterület egységéért, *Budapesti Hírlap*, 8 January 1919. 5. A székelyek kiáltványa, 8 Órai Újság, 26 January 1919, 4.

[45] Ionela- Felicia Moscovici: La France et le Banat, 225–236., 261., Jakabffy Elemér – Páll György: A bánsági magyaraság, 19–22.

[46] For the extremes, see, Cererile musulmanilor din Dobrogea, *Românul*, 7 June 1919, 2.

[47] ANIC DGP dosar 8/1919, f. 116–117.

[48] Migration – En.

original inhabitants there, the oppression nevertheless continued, first, within the Voivodina province (1849 – 1860) and later, in the dualist Hungary. The conclusion was intended to be a rhetorical flourish, but it was rather simple and threatening: If the consequences are not drawn from the history of the region, there will not be a single Romanian who would allow foreign gendarmes to trample upon the soil of Transylvania's gate, where the great Traian had entered the province.[49]

However, using this kind of historical arguments was not the only way to assert the Romanian claims. In Soroca, the city in the annexed Bessarabia, another secondary school professor focused on the more recent "innumerable sacrifices" of the "small Romanian people" during World War I. The Banat question should not be used for political purposes, he continued – obviously referring to the ongoing blame game among the politicians[50] –, as every Romanian should feel that Romania belongs to all Romanians.[51]

At the height of the series of rallies was the one held at Șiria on 9 June 9 1919. It was modelled on the Alba Iulia Great Assembly, the Romanian villages sending their delegations for an event that finally gave expression to the Romanian demands.[52] According to press reports, the presence was tens of thousands strong (much more than the few thousands that protested in Târgu Mureș on 28 November 1918). The notabilities present were also from the region– Ștefan Cicio Pop, Victor Beleș, Iustin Marsieu. The emphasis on the Banat specificities was, however, very weak. Cicio Pop recalled the moment when he was the first candidate at an election in Șiria in 1905 and continued with the events related to the war. Somewhat surprisingly, he asserted that the national unity was fostered in August 1916, when Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary. Romania deserved payment for its

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[49] It was a fairly conventional Romanian Banat history, see Bálint Varga: In the Middle of the Nation… 314–316., 327.

[50] Ion Novacescu, "Chestiune Banatului între politica națională și politica de partid. Mari polemicic politice și parlamentare (Decembrie 1923)," *Analele Banatului*, Seria Archeologie/Istorie (2013): 465–485, 465–466.

[51] ANIC DGP, dosar 8/1919, f. 172.

[52] Marea adunarea nationala pentru alipirea Banatului, *Românul*, 11 June 1919, 2.

suffering and all territories inhabited by Romanians, therefore the Banat should belong to Romania, he concluded. The next speaker, Amos Frâncu, also constructed his argument around national unity, without making any distinction between different sub-groups of Romanians or mentioning any Banat specificity. However, he also implied a not so veiled threat, when he urged the liberation of every Romanian, beyond the Dniester, but also in Ukraine, the Timoc-valley and the Negotin.[53]

The tone of the speeches in Lugoj, held on 10 June 1919, was similar. Thus, George Popoviciu who spoke to the congregated peasants (tens of thousands in the local newspaper), after outlining the historical continuity of Romanians in the province, went on to invoke the memory of a similar mass gathering at the same place on 15 June 1848, when the Romanians demanded the autonomy of the province and the Romanianization of its administration.[54] It was one of those rare occasions, when the texts made more than a passing reference to the Banat as a specific region, the role of autonomous status for the province in modern Romanian history being asserted. However, the speaker concluded that the Banat should merge with Greater Romania. Finally, the declaration adopted at this event complained over the persecution of Romanians under the "Serbian" occupation, emphasizing recent martyrhood.[55]

Despite the similar aim of national unity, the Székely mobilization consciously used the tropes of the established Székely historical mythology, while the Banat was not represented as a specific area of a distinct Romanianness, rather as the cradle of the whole nation. The difference was even more palpable in how the relationship between the center and the region was perceived. The Székely National Council asserted a certain special role and independence from the Mother-the argument being complemented, as it was (in Paál's proposal, with the idea of the WWI national martyrhood.

[53] Ibid.

[54] George Popoviciu, *Memorii cu privire la integritatea Banatului* (Caransebeş, 1929); 65–69. Popoviciu was the author of the most elaborated Romanian historz of the Banat written before 1918 bz a local intellectual. See Bţlint Varga: In

[55] Ibid., 73–75.

Meanwhile, the Romanian speakers were eager to emphasize a seamless unity of all Romanians, without showing any difference within. The different approach is hardly astonishing, as the Székelys basically wanted to preserve as much from Hungarian nationhood on their territory as possible, and even an independent republic – especially if ialigned with Hungary economically or in foreign policy – was considered as being a better perspective than the Romanian rule. The support from the Hungarian governments for these plans came[56]; because from Budapest's perspective, it was again better than Romanian sovereignty as a default outcome. On the contrary, the Banat Romanians wanted to avoid offering any new argument for the South Slav state, and it was also easier to foster solidarity among Romanians elsewhere without mentioning any differences. But it is also true that there was not much in Banat Romanian tradition that was understood as an expression of Banat specificity and character, the Banat being more of a geographic concept, although developed partly due to the administrative separation of the region, especially from Transylvania.

As these efforts to mobilize the masses and demonstrate that the whole nation is lending its active support to the cause of the Banat were aligned with diplomacy, it should not surprise anyone that the content of another genre of lobbying – memoranda– was hardly different from public speeches. As underlined above, the Hungarian government cautiously avoided to qualify the Székely region as a specific one, and neither Paál's devise, nor the separate memorandum of the Székely National Council reached the peace conference: In early 1920, when the Hungarian delegation arrived to Paris, the council did not exist anymore, and Paál was in Odorheiu, firmly under Romanian control.

The Romanian intellectuals from the Banat, however, prepared a series of memoranda, which were submitted to the Ruling Council, the Bucharest government and several French generals, among them Franchet d'Espérey.[57] The memos were of a generic nature, the historical argument was hardly

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[56] Especially after it was clear that Hungary will not be provided with a plebiscite on its lost territories, Hungarian politicians and experts lent practical and financial support to those circles in the Székelyland which imagined a new Székely Republic. Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza, 79–86.

[57] "Bănățenii prezinta din nou memorandum conferinței de pace," Românul, July 1, 1919, 3: George Popoviciu, *Memorii cu privire la integritatea Banatului* (Caransebeș, 1929).

original, based on the assumption of Romanian continuity,[58] and characterized the Banat Romanians as the purest Romanians who preserved their Romanian soul in every moment.[59] The longest one used tropes like Trajan's entry into Dacia through the Banat, the early colonization and Latinization, the dubious claim that the Banat was an autonomous part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary and later, in the fiteentth century, the local Romanians received autonomy. The text is essentially a long and detailed history of the region along well-known lines, which emphasized regarding the modern era the Romanian national struggle against any oppression, pointing out that the Romanian nationalist candidates at parliamentary elections were always the most successful in Caraș-Severin county. But instead of treating it as a regional specificity, the argument was used as a proof of their stronger Romanianness. Thus, the region was again subordinated to, almost dissolved within, the national unity.

Afterlife: two national peripheries and one region In a curious manner, the distinct features of the region became more visible after the mobilization efforts subsided during the peace conference, and it happened through the integration of this recent history of the how the area was occupied and the border was drawn. Still, the main difference remained in this subsequent period too: the Székelys were further imagined by themselves and by Hungarians as a distinct people and the most authentic Hungarians, a repository of the best national character traits. By contrast, tthe Banat and its Romanians got attached to Romania and the Romanian nation without asserting a peculiarity, like in the case of the Székely region.

I do not mean here, however, that the struggle for the border during the Peace conference in Paris would not have affected how these regions were imagined by Romanians or Hungarians within and from without. First, the two regions became avatars for specific injustices, which resonated well beyond their geographic borders. The violation of the idea of national self-determination was

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[58] See, Bálint Varga: In the Middle of the Nation, 327.
[59] Popoviciu, Memorii, 5–6.

manifested in the case of the Székelys, so that it was easily used by Hungarian propaganda for the revision of the peace treaty, signed on 4 July 1920, and it was permanently projected to the Hungarians within the country.[60] It enhanced the notion of a better Székely Hungarianness and created an entitlement for redemption and compensation.[61]

The Banat Hungarians were also portrayed as sufferers, but the most important development for them was how their region was realigned and moved on the mental map from "Southern Hungary" to the "Eastern Romania". The Hungarian government had a series of clandestine agencies that channeled support from Budapest to the lost territories. Initially, the Banat was part of the support scheme dedicated to the southern parts, later to be incorporated in the so-called "Keleti Actio".[62] But within the new Hungarian minority party it still retained a regional difference, instead of county organizations a regional one was erected.

While it was certainly less apparent in the case of Banat Romanians, their carefully constructed martyrdom, during the South Slav occupation and later, placed them in a similar position as that of the Székelys'.[63] It gave Romania an argument when it came to the injustice the country suffered at the Peace conference, and it was also a handy leverage in political struggles within the country. Not only politicians of the RNP –the Romanian National Party (in 1919 acting within the Ruling Council, and later, as members of Alexandru VaidaVoevod's Cabinet), but also the National Liberals, all active in the diplomatic efforts to change the decision of the Peace conference, debated the responsibility for the outcome. As it was Vaida-Voevod who signed the treaty, the RNP leadership that earlier

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[60] Miklós Zeidler: Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary: 1920–1945. Boulder, CO: East European Mongraphs, 2007.; Although it was less effective as usually assumed.
Gábor Egry: Endangered by Alienation? Raising a Minority Elite between Nationalizing Higher Education Systems: The New Generation of Hungarians in Interwar Romania
In: Bieber, Floran; Heppner, Harald (szerk.) Universities and Elite Formation in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe. LIT Verlag, Münster, 2015 39-58.
[61] Egry Gábor: Az erdélyiség színeváltozása. Kísérlet az Erdélyi Párt ideológiájának és identitáspolitikájának elemzésére. Napvilág, Budapest, 2008. 125–134.
[62] Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza, 297–298.
[63] Ion Novacescu: „Chestiunea banatului",

accused the liberals of incompetence, wanted to brush off Vaida's responsibility for the loss of a part of the province.[64] The RNP's electoral manifesto from April 1920, drafted when the party was in opposition, asserted, nevertheless, in its 5th point that the party will fight for the recovery of the lost parts of the Banat and Maramureș.[65] Thus, the "loss" of the part of Banat was used as an argument of electoral propaganda against the liberals and People's Party (PP) candidates. Furthermore, the memory of the Serbian occupation was used to discredit those Romanian politicians from the region who followed the example of Octavian Goga and Vasile Goldis and joined their ranks around 1920. The Banat RNP press attacked such figures vigorously, ridiculed them with reports of alleged incidents at their campaign manifestations, in which peasants booed them. It was maliciously remarked that these politicians, who before 1918 were followers of Vasile Mangra, whose pro-Hungarian stance was censured too, bowed down in front of King Petar's throne.[66]

Such symbolic repositioning could not alter the fact that the Banat, one of the most developed regions of Hungary before 1918, became a periphery of the new state. It rather highlights that just as in the symbolic sphere it needed support from the center, but was reliant on resources from Bucharest for completion of the Romanianization of the province, especially in the economic sphere. The very multiethnic nature of the province – an important element of its perception from the Hungarian side – made it impossible to "detach" the region from the Romanian national unity,[67] even if complaints over the conduct of the new state were growing, leading to assertions that the Old Kingdom's rule brought chaos and decline.[68]

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[64] Ionela-Felicia Moscovici, La France et le Banat, 364–380.; Discursul dlui Iuliu Maniu, Românul, December 27, 1919. 1.

[65] Congresul de la Alba Iulia, Românul, April 27, 1920. 1.

[66] Adunarea Partidului Popular în Sânnicolau Mare. Românul, May 16, 1920. 2.

[67] Although there were attemts to deny this fact: A „Glasul Minorităților". Magyar Kisebbség, 1923. 697.; Mi is itt volnánk. Magyar Kisebbség, 1924. 318–319.

[68] [68] Gábor Egry: Crowding Out. Experiences of Difference, Discourses of Identity and Political Mobilization in Interwar Transylania. Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis, Series Historica. IX. 2012, 203–224., 215.

There were attempts to assert the superiority of the Banat Romanians,[69] often only with implicit

suggestions that their presence and their leading role in Greater Romania will strengthen the

morality and Romanianness of the new country – an argument frequently used in the Hungarian-

Székely relation too. But suc attempts was rarely done without pointing out Romanina national

credentials, and even the anti-Bucharest Banat regionalism was dissolved within the joint anti-Old

Kingdom political stance and movement led by Transylvanians.[70] In this construct, the Banat was

symbolically different, but in practice had the same grievances and demands as every other new

province. The Banat Romaniansavoided thus strengthening a specific regional consciousness, rather

furthered common Romanian national goals.[71]

Finally, and probably, the most conspicuous element of these developments, which drew the most

distinct boundaries within the national groups, was the way external actors used these regionalist

notions for dividing their alleged national opponents. While the idea of a Székely republic was given

up very early by the leading politicians and replaced with the program of Hungarian national

autonomy in order to preserve the unity of the Hungarian minority, the Romanian politicians tried,

on the contrary, to capitalize on the sense of Székely difference. As early as January 1919, an

emissary of the Ruling Council approached Paál, who was under arrest, and made an offer: If Paál

would organize a Székely manifestation with the aim of declaring the Székely's willingness to join

Romania, the region would receive broad autonomy.[72] The offer was declined, but the idea was

revived later, when a number of Hungarian figures, like Béla Maurer, Géza Kiss or Árpád Fáy, were

running in Székelyföld as pro-Romanian Hungarian candidates for the parliament. Later, in the

Chamber of Deputies, they willingly declared, as representatives of the Székelys, that their "nation's"

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[69] "Noul mitropolit primat al României," *Românul*, 4 January 1920, 1.

[70] See Irina Livezeanu, Cultural Politics… Florian Kührer-Wielach: Siebenbürgen ohne Siebenbürger? Zentralstaatliche Integration nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg, De Gruyter, Oldenbourg, München, 2014

[71] "O mare adunare în Alba Iulia," *28* August 1927.

[72] Paál Árpád, Emlékirat a semleges, 132.

was willing to freely unite with Romania.[73] It is thus not surprising that even the State Security

followed news of any Székely republican movement – not just to suppress it, but to manipulate, to

separate the Székelys from the Hungarians.[74] In the thirties, a serologic research that was supposed

to prove that Székelys were Magyarized Romanians was carried out.[75]

The Hungarians in Romania had to be more careful in order to avoid censorship, but they had ample

material to make a structurally similar assertion regarding the Banat. As the accusations targeting the

People' Party politicians show, in the Banat there was in fact   a large group of Romanian intellectuals

who were aligned with a pro-Hungarian politics. Some of them left politics around 1920, others

joined different Romanian parties, such as the People' Party and the National-Liberal Party, even the

RNP stalwarts had a past in Hungary that was sometimes less characteristically anti-Hungarian as

they wished to project. Therefore, any retrospective intervention recalling the dualist era was

capable to challenge the nationalist credentials of interwar Banat regionalists, at least implicitly.

Elemér Jakabffy, a Hungarian politician from Lugoj, who was active before and after 1918, provided

ample material in his journal, Magyar Kisebbség.[76] It was not a direct attack on anyone, but it

certainly questioned assertions, like the unshakable nationalism of the Banat Romanians, and

revealed a much more subtle local world, the one that was obscured by the dominance of Romanian

nationalism within the Banat regionalism.

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[73] Bárdi Nándor: Otthon és haza, 109, 395., 422–423.
[74] Kristóf György: Magyar avagy székely? Pásztortűz, 1921./ 27. 396-399.
[75] Marius Turda, The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania, Slavic Review, 66, 2007/3, 413–441.
[76] Jakabffy Elemér, *Adatok a magyarországi románság történetéhez* (Magyra Kisebbség, 1927), 446–448, 493–494,. 1928. 187–188. No, it is a journal with continuous page numbering in every year.