Part II

Postimperial Legacies, Legitimism and Memory

6 The Leftover Empire? Imperial Legacies and Statehood in the Successor States of Austria-Hungary[11]

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Abstract

The clear symbolic break with the Monarchy was often obscuring, sometimes deliberately, how the pre-1918 past has shaped the successor states in their everyday operation and how this legacy served as a leverage for specific social groups and local societies to promote their peculiar interests. States were ready to relinquish some of their authority and bargain over administrative practices. Bound by trajectories set by an institutional legacy impossible to dispose of in a moment (existing laws, persisting institutions) states and statehood soon started to resemble a patchwork within the new boundaries. It is, however, not easy to grasp what it meant for the people of the time and how statehood changed during a long transition period. A local approach promises a viable route to systematic napping of the varieties of state transition. This chapter sets out a comparative analysis of such local cases, arguing that not

1

> just the commonly mentioned multi-ethnicity and occasional repression against minorities made the successor states quasi-empires. Built on board social experiences with imperial rule and constrained by the institutional and habitual legacy of imperial existence, their internal institutional and political dynamics was more imperial as their leaders wished to admit.

Francis Joseph's statue was initially a very controversial piece of public art in the city of Karánsebes/Karansebesch/Caransebeș. Once the seat of a border regiment (which was disbanded in 1876), the region gave a series of well-known and loyal officers and generals to the Habsburg Army,[2] and the population of the city—predominantly Romanians and Germans—cultivated the memory of their heroic feats. However, the plan for the erection of a statue to Francis Joseph in the city of Caransebeș was originally received coldly by Romanian nationalists, who saw it as sign of voluntary submission to Magyarization. Leaders of the Romanian national movement even organized peasant protests; nonetheless, the statue was unveiled amid huge festivities by Archduke Joseph in October 1906.[3]

Thirteen years later, after the city came under Romanian rule, the new authorities were quick to remove Francis Joseph from the marble pedestal in the central park of the city, a move vocally disapproved of by the local Romanians.[4] For a while no one really seemed interested in the fate of the bronze statue, nor in erecting anything on its empty place. Until, that is, a military inspection of the voluntary firefighter association's storage rooms in 1924 accidentally revealed the metal emperor hidden in a corner.[5] This discovery set in motion the administrative chain of command, and soon, the city was ordered to transfer the statue to the military arsenal in Bucharest, where it was supposed to be melted down and used for the purposes of the army. Someone, however—allegedly from the city council—had an even better idea: the old statue could be repurposed into a new statue of the king of Greater Romania, Ferdinand I.[6] As we shall

see, this version of the story, which was presented in the press, was hardly true; in fact, a government order from 1925 commanded the city to erect a statue for the King Ferdinand I and, for this purpose, use the material from the Francis Joseph monument. Nothing happened, however, and the mayor was again reminded of his duty in 1926, when he replied that due to financial crisis, it was impossible for the city to come up with the necessary funds. Another reminder came a year later and was met with the same reply, but the situation became more serious for the reluctant city in 1928. The usual elusive answer satisfied neither the Ministry of Interior nor the Ministry of Defense, and the city was forced to start working on a solution. Although the process set in motion may have appeared more earnest than the earlier rejections of the project, for an observer trained in the public events of dualist Hungary (a period that was crucial for the socialization of most of the city's politicians), it reflects an eerily familiar set of tactics of delay that were often a target of jokes before 1918. The city—with rhetorical flourish abounding in its resolution—set up a commission, consisting of the county prefect, the mayor, and an ever-larger number of local notables co-opted in successive waves. At its first session, the committee, which had grown to include even more local notables among its members, decided to invite Constantin Argetoianu, the current minister of agriculture and a seasoned political turncoat, to become the honorary president of the committee. They also requested that he propose sculptors for the statue, as he—the Bucharest gentleman—would be more familiar with the best artists of the country. In the light of the preceding developments, it is hard not to see the activities of the committee as simple delaying tactics employing every available means to maintain the status quo. Already, at its first session, one of the members argued that the pedestal of the original statue—where the Romanian king's monument was to be erected—was unsuitable. He pointed out that the Francis Joseph statue was placed in the city in a Hungarian

spirit, decidedly anti-Romanian. It was facing Romania as an enemy and presenting the emperor as the defender of the Banat against the Romanians. Thus, a similar set up of the Romanian king's statue would demean the unifier of the Romanians. (In reality, the statue was simply in the corner of the city's main square, at the edge of a park and facing the main street that even today leads from a Catholic Church to the most important public buildings surrounding the green square.)

Nevertheless, the growing pressure on the committee made them initiate action, and the mayor contacted Argetoianu, who recommended a sculptor from Bucharest. Plans were prepared for the statue, while another artist made an official offer as well. Fortunately (for the city council, that is), budget calculations showed that the statue would cost around 500,000 lei, even with the use of the bronze from the Francis Joseph statue. And even more, fortunately, Argetoianu's candidate found the original monument to be in a state of deterioration, making its material unsuitable for reuse. Still, even with the successful prolonging of the design process and with the favourable expert opinion on the unsuitability of the bronze, it is safe to assume that committee members were relieved to hear of the fall of the liberal government and Argetoianu with it in November 1928.

It took over a year to come to the matter again under the new National Peasant Party administration. Things came to a head in the spring of 1930 and took another surprising turn when, after another order insisting on the melting of the Francis Joseph statue, the interim city administration (an unelected group consisting of appointees on the basis of party loyalty, usually made up of loyalists of the actual governing party) abandoned the evasive delaying tactics. Instead, the five-member *Comisia interimară* issued a resolution stating that the commission had evaluated the statue and found that it had extraordinary artistic value. Designed by János Fadrusz

and after his sudden death realized by one of his disciples, Rezső Gál Rollinger, the statue was to be preserved. And, somewhat surprisingly, the incoming, elected city council stood by the decision and asserted the property rights of the city over the statue, even in the face of claims made by the army. Through 1931—the year that the latest document in the file was produced—the statue remained in the voluntary firefighters' storage. No statue of a Romanian king was erected on the empty pedestal. Only in 1943, during Ion Antonescu's tenure and in the shadow of his ethnocratic state, did appear on this spot the figure of General Ion Dragalina, a soldier from the last generation of the erstwhile border regiment, who left Habsburg service for that of Romania and died in November 1916.

This story considered alone is a tiny detail and certainly a proof of the resilience of local elites and their customs in the face of nationalizing states. But if we think of it as a metaphor, it gains another dimension: the empire, as a dead weight lies heavily on the new state which could not dispose of it. Such a metaphoric perception was not uncommon in post-First World War East-Central Europe and easily justified a series of sometimes harsh measures to cut off ties with the Habsburg past.[7] But was the empire really a dead weight, a fallen statue that some obscure local elites, far from the centre kept in the corner, under the rugs for better times still to come? In this chapter, I will argue that despite the noisy rejection of the empire, and its stigmatization as the prison of the people, its legacy was often surprisingly positive for the successor states. Not only in terms of modernization or culture but also regarding the practical aspects of statehood: the functional state. And among the many facets of this imperial legacy, lingering around some was even crucial for the management of the new states and their better workings—although as such phenomena were often contrary to the homogenizing nation-state they claimed to be, it rarely happened with fanfare and publicly. In elaborating this argument, I will point out some of the

most important elements of the institutional legacy, the role of informality in managing internal differences of the successor states, and conclude with a comparison of how the political, the administrative culture and the tradition of imperial rule helped two very different successors of Austria-Hungary, the democratic and prosperous Czechoslovakia and the more autocratic and less developed Romania to bridge deep divisions within their edifice.

Imperial Leftovers: Law, Institutions and Practices

The heaviest of all the dead weights left by the empire was its laws and regulations. Developed throughout centuries, and hardly homogeneous—with three acknowledged legal systems in Cisleithania, Hungary and Croatia and with abundant varieties within the first one, it guided all of the relationships within society—including war-time special measures which offered leeway for the new states to deal with "security threats", i.e. eliminate some forms of political dissent, especially ethnic movements.[8] Given its sheer amount, it is not surprising that only a part of this legal body was replaced and unified within the new states. It was usually the administration that came first, together with education.[9] But civic codes, commercial or labour laws, different land registers proved very resilient and even proudly announced new measures, like agrarian reforms turned out to diverge across regions or foundered on reluctant execution. Czech politicians, for example, agonized for two decades how to unify family laws because they inherited civil marriage and relatively lax divorce regulations from Hungary that they could not simply overturn without causing a legal earthquake. On the other hand, despite the professed progressive character of their state they were reluctant to unbound women from the family restrictions imposed on them by the Austrian civic code. Thus, finally, nothing significant happened in this regard during the existence of the First Republic.[10]

Sometimes, it was not deliberate delay, just obscurity that glossed over the disparate situation, until a sudden event brought it to light, like the case of a blind Transylvanian Hungarian lady selling flower bouquets from red-white flowers with green leaves in the early 1930s. Transylvanian state security officials duly asked Bucharest what are the legal provisions to use for indictment, and their superiors in the capital replied: there were no such rules among the laws of the Old Kingdom, the authorities there simply used to confiscate the goods. Fortunately, I mean for the authorities and not for the lady, someone discovered a dust-covered copy of a Hungarian collection of ministerial decrees and orders and a ministerial order from 1867 that set specific sentences for publicly presenting foreign national colours.[11]

But people were usually aware of the hodge-podge nature of their existing legislation, for the persistence of which the main reason was not a conspiracy, nor the lack of legal imagination within the legal community, rather the mere fact that this legislation developed in tight connection with social progress and mainly reflected the state of societies.[12] Thus, its preservation was not just a simple matter of imperial survival, or national will, but it was equally important for those who were supposed to get liberated from the yoke of the Habsburgs. The tiny quasi-state of Fiume went the farthest in this regard, as we knew from Dominique Reill's research.[13] The local pro-Italian but autonomist elites created an arbitrary patchwork of Habsburg and Italian legislation, keeping the judgement for themselves which piece of Italian and Habsburg laws to dispose of. But other regional elites or just simple professional interest groups knew very well the significance of the existing laws for safeguarding their relative autonomy and interests too.

Not that governments would not be aware of the necessity of a transition period, but they had different ideas on its length and aim. Temporary bodies of the regional elites, like the Romanian

Consiliul Dirigent sometimes saw themselves as proper provincial or national government, even claiming attributes of sovereignty (ratification of the peace treaty) for themselves. Others—the Slovak special ministry in Bratislava or the Ljubljana provincial administration in the new South Slav state—accepted a more subdued role, but still happily preserved some autonomy vis-á-vis their government, most importantly in filling positions within the administration and deciding on which laws were to be kept and which ones suspended or replaced by decrees.

The crux of the matter was often the involvement of some of the regional elites into the process of transition, sorting out what constituted the body of transitory legal framework that should be preserved for a while. But the issue had a more practical aspect too: when the Romanian government, for example, dissolved the regional quasi-governments and delegated the role of unification to provincial general secretariats, the ministries often circumvent this intermediary structure and issued new decrees directly to their subordinated institutions, without consulting the secretariats, although it was the latter's role, with local experts involved, to find the balance between the existing Habsburg and the new Romanian legal framework, especially when it came to new lower-level legal rules (decrees, orders) that contradicted existing imperial laws creating a legal problem.[14]

The existing laws often provided for local elites or interest groups safeguards against and sometimes even leverage over the new centres. Two notable cases from Romania exemplify this phenomenon, the right to represent clients at the courts in Bukovina and the non-transformation of the institution of public notaries. The former issue sent—mild—waves through the Romanian administration in 1920 when the authorities of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS) inquired with Bucharest about the right of their lawyers to represent clients at the courts in the former Austrian province. The Romanian ministry of justice was completely in the dark, but

the Bukovina officials they asked readily admitted: the SHS administration was right. The law of the province still in force conditioned representation on a law degree from a Cisleithanian university. As many Slovene and Croatian solicitors graduated in Vienna, Graz, maybe even in Prague, they were entitled to act in Bukovina. Unlike the Romanian lawyers from the Old Kingdom, who were otherwise a politically influential branch with good connections in Bucharest ministries and party centres. The solution proposed from Cernăuți told all the complexities and nuances of the situation arisen from Austria-Hungary's demise. Bukovina lawyers were reluctant to renounce their privileges and let the Bucharest competitors come to there, but they were also aware of the implications to make the South Slav's entitlement pubic. Thus, they could only recommend to the Ministry not to publicize too loudly the situation with the SHS lawyers, abolishing or amending the existing legislation was, however, out of question.[15]

The future of public notaries had even broader reverberations as the institution did not exist in the Old Kingdom but was a proven one in all the other provinces, providing relatively cheap basic legal services (drafting contracts, wills, managing inheritance processes, etc.) at prices set by the government. The number of public notaries were limited, every one of them installed by the Minister of Justice, irremovable and not to transfer against their will. Thus, it created a small group with relatively safe income earned from a monopoly. It is therefore, not surprising, that applicants were in abundance while those within the walls of the chamber of public notaries eagerly defended their position and rights. After a relatively quick realignment and redistribution of posts (taking in more Romanians, although in certain areas leaving the minority notaries in place or relocating them to less prosperous localities), the reconstituted chambers fought against any reform of the system, be it the abolishment of the institution or raising the number of

position and diminishing the potential income of notaries. Bukovina and Transylvanian public notaries successfully fend off attempts to even redefine the necessary qualifications, and they were united in this effort across ethnic boundaries.[16]

But the institution was too tempting to use for rewarding political service by the government too. Thus, in 1927 new posts were created, one of them in the wealthy city of Arad. The old public notaries (Romanians with excellent political credentials who took over the positions of Hungarian lawyers in 1920) sued the government and won the case. The Supreme Court of cassation declared the government decree unlawful and void, on the basis of the respective Hungarian legislation, which led to a series of new lawsuits. Finally, the government abandoned the ideas of both complete reform and indiscriminately multiplying the positions, although it could wrench out concessions, mainly assent to new positions from the chambers of public notaries in exchange for higher fees and taxes, as legally prescribed fees were not adjusted to inflation for years by the ministry, which in turn was reluctant to anger the electorate.[17]

Legal unification turned out to be a laborious process, and it never came in its entirety. In 1935, a Hungarian student at the University of Cluj reported to the Budapest government how absurd it was that Transylvania still had two defunct pieces of legislation, the Austrian Civic Code and the Hungarian Commercial laws from 1895, and this way, it became a legal black hole as since 1918 no parliament had the jurisdiction to amend these laws. On the other hand, he continued, Transylvanian Romanian legal scholars and lawyers actively despised their Old Kingdom colleagues, and the judges whose verdicts in cases did not follow the law (and implicitly the customs set by Hungarian courts) they were unfamiliar with. The latter case also manifests how the legal patchwork could undermine the situation of the locals.

United We Stand, Divided…? Nation-Statehood and Imperial Rule

All that exposed forcefully the fundamental contradiction of the successor states: their strong national ideologies, often contrary to the time-honoured practice of managing state–society relationship with the purpose of enabling interpenetration of state and civil society[18] and the weak resources at their disposal. They were nation-states at the normative level of statehood but could not muster the resources and establish the practices that would have corresponded with that claim—apart from gradually securitizing every manifestation of minority nationhood.[19] More precisely, their resources were weak as regards to the tasks their faced and their claims on a homogeneous nation-state, although this weakness manifested itself differently. Some of them, like Czechoslovakia, could count on a numerous imperial bureaucracy, the continuation of the existing institutions in the Czech Lands (including such imperial structures as the railways), which enabled them to relatively soon dispose of the non-Czech public employees, even from the strategic services (something that never happened in its entirety in Romania, for example). However, most of these officials had a past within the imperial public and civil service, and they brought with them a specific understanding of what it meant to be a bureaucrat, an agent of modernization but also a mediator between state and society, state and politics in a way that enabled interpenetration of those fields.[20]

But when it came to handle the societies on the new territories, the new Czech officials had their shortcomings, especially when how to play the expected social role of a high- or mid-level public official. Acceptance from the locals, whose societal culture was infused with many elements of a feudal past were not easily granted for people exhibiting manifestly petty-bourgeois habits, whatever the locals understood with that label.[21] Especially, the behaviour of Czech military officers was found wanting of what the Hungarian customs understood under the label of chivalry: lavish feasts and huge debts, duelling and courting the ladies.[22] Furthermore, in distant

regions, like Transcarpathia, these administrators took on the task of building a new, autonomous administration, and modernizing a backward zone, but this attempt soon turned out to become a colonizing mission managed by former imperial bureaucrats, never actually yielding the region to the local Ruthenians because of Prague's fear of the communist threat.[23]

Other states had less plentiful human resources, which led to ad hoc measures, including retaining (or forcing to remain in service) even those who refused to take an oath of allegiance and employing hastily trained people with often low levels of education. Romania was especially exposed to this situation, to the extent that some leaders of strategic services admitted: they will not be able to staff the service with Romanians and run them efficiently in the next 20 years.[24]

But obviously the significance of shortage of human resources always depended on the extent of that new territories that turned former imperial bureaucrats—obviously speaking German alongside their native tongue and often other languages—a precious asset, like it happened in Poland. By contrast, in the SHS Kingdom, it was less the lack of people willing to enter public service that affected public administration, more the different bureaucratic traditions of SCS public officials. Fortunately, there were annexed territories that became free hunting grounds at the expense of the previous Hungarian administration, like Prekmurje where Cisleithanian Slav (predominately Slovene) officials mercilessly fired and replaced the Hungarian administration.[25]

In most cases, the rule seems to be that the lower the level of administration, the less significant the changes in personnel were, a glaring and counterintuitive example being the predominantly Hungarian Székelyföld, where over 70% of village notaries were retained by the new Romanian administration, a ratio very close to the cities of Upper Hungary where the Czechoslovak authorities had to deal with their own lack of personnel.[26] And while the share of minority officials gradually declined until a new wave of nationalizing from the mid-1930s, they had a

relatively secure place and important role within these administrative systems.[27] The two cases, respectively, highlight two factors that facilitated—through informality—a kind of compromise: democratic politics in Czechoslovakia which enabled local elites to acquire administrative positions if elected, and more importantly, for Habsburg legacies, internal clientelism. The Cisleithanian bureaucracy was interpenetrated with civil society and politics; indeed, local elected bodies and corporatist organizations had a growing influence on decisions, even if the self-perception of the state finally did not allow for full-fledged acceptance of technical/professional expertise as equal to legal professionalism within the administration. Still, Austrian bureaucracy had to deal with a democratizing society, which was, however, also an object of modernization driven by a state nurturing its precious Josephinist legacies. The interface between society/politics and administration was often informality.[28]

Another form of informality, stemming from internal clientelism, was more significant within Romania, whose internal architecture tended to be autocratic, democratic processes, especially elections were mostly neglected at the local level. (The first local elections were held in 1926, and even subsequently, they were held sparsely and irregularly. Governments, instead, dissolved elected councils and entrusted interim bodies, the *comisia interimară* familiar from Caransebeș, appointed by the government of by county prefects with the management of local affairs.) While the mid-levels (counties) of the administration are usually considered to be politicized (mainly because the county heads were nominated by the government and according to party loyalty), a closer look reveals a duality of the positions within the county institutions. Only the few highest positions (prefect, sub-prefect, chief of cabinet) were accorded on political grounds, the others rather filled with a group of bureaucrats who rotated in these posts, like the head of financial administration, technical services, administrative department, documentary section, etc.[29]

Furthermore, the prefects and sub-prefects—despite having strong political ties usually only with one of the rival Romanian parties—still formed a professional body,[30] clientelism set in at every level, safeguarding lower level officials and employees from arbitrary disposal. Those who remained or those who get in the administration were relatively safe, even minority ones.[31] And even, in the seemingly outlier Yugoslavia, there are signs that the problems caused by the abrupt removal of Hungarians made administrative leaders to reconsider how they handled those regions. At least in Prekmurje they hired auxiliary notaries who could communicate with the local population and occasionally even convey their wishes to the new rulers.

Meanwhile, the composite nature of the administration—including the protracted elimination of legal differences—made experience before 1918 valuable for the new states. Having a past even in the wartime, Cisleithanian administration that was infamous for its arbitrary conduct could not taint those people enough for being barred from the Czechoslovak or Romanian civil service. That's how a district chief (Bezirkshauptmann) from Moravia could become deputy governor of the new Transcarpathia or a Romanian district chief from Maramureș (the dreaded *főszolgabíró* of Romanian memoires), the most appreciated expert on Transylvanian administrative issues and secretary-general of Someș province in the Romania of the king's dictatorship, after 1938.[32]

As already mentioned, other forms of expertise served as insurance policies for further employment too, especially in the strategic services. However, often, the very institutions continued operating in an imperial spirit, even though their geographic scope was narrowed down heavily. Czech railways meticulously continued the development projects designed in the previous era, the Romanian post office refused to transfer international mail to Bucharest for censorship—after the Ministry of Interior accused them of lax censorship—because it would have forced them to pay reparations for undelivered recommended post, but also manifesting an

independence not presumed by the logic of the nation-state exposed to omnipresent Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism.[33] Thus, imperial legacies had an institutional aspect as well, but with rapid, often deep wartime changes (like enhanced redistribution, extended welfare, requisitioning, the suspension of rule of law in Cisleithania), institutions were in a flux even before they had to refashion themselves as revolutionary and national ones. Furthermore, it was the easiest part of unification to establish a unitary administration and ministerial structure—a move which often aggravated the tensions between centre and province as reflected in the frequent "reforms" of the administration implemented in Czechoslovakia (introduction of provincial assemblies), the SHS Kingdom/Yugoslavia or Romania.

Expertise was often courted in domains outside the administration proper and strategic services, like the education system. But, in this regard, some of the new states were adamant to reverse the situation, especially on the territories acquired from dualist Hungary, where the education system was subject to a marked Hungarianization process before 1918.[34] Thus, while Romania wished to retain as many skilled teachers as possible, they wanted them to run a new schooling system in which the Romanian language was predominant. Not being able to comply with the new requirements, most minority teachers left service after the mid-1920s or switched to denominational schools, but both were detrimental to their social status and prestige they enjoyed earlier as professors at a secondary schools or headmasters in rural ones. Meanwhile, educators in the mushrooming new schools were not easily accepted by local elites if they were not familiar with their social practices. The pull of the "old world" was sometimes surprisingly strong, even if through rejection, that is why complaints over the behaviour of newcomers or that of the locals, figure quite often in reports and newspaper articles.[35]

The implementation of national ideas was thus hardly attainable, and states were reliant on at least a minimum of acceptance from those segments of their population that they looked at suspiciously or took as a threat. Bridging the gap between the former, normative aspect of the state—nation-statehood being anchored in the soon-to-be passed constitutions—and the social realities of diversity, needed a functional state that could manage the latter's consequences, to allow for the interpenetration of a still authoritative state and a divided society which was even infused with the ideas of mass democracy. In some cases, it could happen through legislation and democratic local politics, Czechoslovakia being the most clear-cut case, with legally set and relatively low thresholds for the use of minority languages, a complex system of education at primary and secondary level and local self-governments with a significant jurisdiction. Thus, the formal influence of local interest groups on politics grew significantly, especially in the former Hungarian parts, while the cherished mediating role of the imperial bureaucracy offered a model to manage state-society relations.

But even the imperial legacies in the form of accepted, sometimes required practices of the previous administration played a crucial role in this process, mostly manifesting itself in the tendency of Czech bureaucrats and officials in the Slovak territories to start learning Hungarian, a development noted with surprise—and probably taken as a sign of hope for a quick reversal of the table—by informants of the Hungarian government. While it is hard to tell how much these officials interiorized the guiding idea of the nation-state, or went even farther and looked at these areas to be civilized, they still followed a tradition of the Austrian administration, which also helped them to gain access to local societies, often still defined by Hungarians either as inhabitants or as visitors to popular holiday resorts, and where a Hungarian uniform could still in

1930 generate frenzy among waiters expecting the usual lavish feasts and tips typical of Hungarian "gentlemen".[36]

In other countries, however, in the absence of formal rules and attempts to differentiate institutionally, the functional state was inevitably informal too. Slovene administrators of Prekmurje hiring middlemen exercised informality just as much as their Romanian counterparts who gave in to minority demands to a surprising extent. With a large number of minority officials retained at the lower levels of administration, even though the use of languages other than Romanian was gradually suppressed (although the Ministry of Interior felt itself compelled to issue warnings in this regard as late as 1924), the widespread use of minority languages in verbal communication became common in the new provinces.[37] It was again advantageous for those Romanians who either served in the Hungarian administration, or who were educated in Hungary and spoke Hungarian, but also for some of the minority officials and employees who exercised such informal or formal bilingualism during the dualist era.[38] But informality helped adaptation in other spheres too. School directors with a past in the Hungarian education system were sometimes very helpful with Hungarian colleagues, tried to hide the continued use of Hungarian in Romanian state schools, accepted pupils for extracurricular education or were lenient with minority pupils taking *matura*, later—after 1924—bachelor exams. It is even possible to claim that these practices manifested—and just think of how the Caransebeș council handled Francis Joseph's bronze remnants—an administrative culture that was a strong element of the imperial legacy. It is even true for Hungary, which was disguised as unitary nation-state, but in terms of centre-periphery relations and local management of non-Hungarian speaking areas showed a surprising flexibility.[39]

Informality was, however, more than an element of personal, individual adaptation, or a means to uphold the sense of familiarity and predictability within the administered population. It could gain an institutional dimension. Even Czechoslovakia's relatively open and openly differentiated political system (with the autonomy of Transcarpathia, the establishing of provinces with provincial assemblies in 1927) was impacted upon by the more "secretive" legacies of the empire, first at the level of national politics and how mass politics was perceived in relation to expertise, second at the far corners of the country, which was seen as less developed and in need of civilizing.[40] What role experts should play in politics, how the influence of unripe people should be channelled not to be detrimental to the efficiency of the state and its developmental efforts, Both President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Prime Minister Antonin Švehla expressed reservations regarding the uncontrolled influence of the masses, and they stressed the importance the bureaucracy's knowledge and enlightened goals. It was supposed to be the role of these experts to participate in the work of political for, like parliamentary committees, where they could again mediate between politics and expert rule. In this sense, these Czech statesmen were surprisingly close to how the role of the administration was understood in the last years of Austria-Hungary, not necessarily surprising given that both politicians had a heavy baggage of experience with imperial politics.[41] And the bureaucracy, while generally efficient and not quite corrupted, often saw its role as civilizers who should reconstruct a democratic world amidst the remnants of a feudal Hungary, fend off the threat from radicals, like Communists and overcome the resistance of local elites, like the Rusyns, who had grown too close to Hungary and Hungarians.[42]

In the heavily centralized Romania, informality was used for safeguarding specific institutions of the new provinces, especially when the new state's centre was outside of the former Habsburg

realm. Voluntary firefighters in Romania are a case in point, as institutions that not only had a practical importance in defending property and human lives, but as ones that conferred prestige and status on their middle- and lower-middle class members. As such, they were deeply embedded in the local social fabric and institutional system and a centre of civic activism, with their spectacular exercises, music bands and balls, and the local administrations frequently helped them financially. They were, however, absent in the Old Kingdom where firefighters operated in military subordination—a quite different perception of state and society relations—and the civic activism in the new provinces mobilizing many non-Romanians made them suspicious of irredentism. The military general staff ordered their disbandment in 1923, but Romanian county prefects pushed back, just as the Caransebeș mayor did, who sent an eight pages long emotionally heated letter to Bucharest, not only denying the allegations but elevating the firefighters to the status of "the most altruistic institution", of which "all true sons of the homeland" ought to be members. The result was a compromise, the general staff giving up on disbandment but insisting on regular control by military authorities—and Francis Joseph was discovered during the very first inspection in Caransebeș.[43]

Shielding the association was not the last act that demonstrated the close-knit relationship of the association and the local administration. A year later, the firefighters submitted a request to the mayor and asked the city to levy a new tax on real estate owners, a tax of fire safety that was to fill the depleted coffers of the association. The city duly complied with the request, blurring further the boundaries, informally making an association that was also an imperial legacy, part of the Romanian nation-state.[44]

Informality had another important dimension, and it was where all the other aspects came together and constituted the most important of all imperial legacies for a centralized state:

differentiated rule. Empires are famous for such relations used to balance between metropole and provinces and between the provinces too, Austria-Hungary being no exception.[45] Kronland administrations and diets, the institution of Landsmannminister, and later, the emerging series of provincial compromises embodied it in Cisleithanian laws and practices. But not even the other half of the Monarchy, the supposedly unitary nation-state dualist Hungary was free from this aspect of imperial existence. Here, regional elites from Maramureș, Southern Banat (Caransebeș), the Saxon areas, Fiume or in some Upper Hungarian cities could come to an agreement with the government, in which they traded political support for the government (also in the form of running for parliament as candidates of the Hungarian liberal governing party) for relative autonomy in their sphere of interest and for material support. Apart from Fiume, none of these gained a legal form, but it was a widespread practice and as such also the guiding idea of what was offered to resolve so serious issues like the Romanian nationalist challenge at the eve of the Second World War.[46]

While Czechoslovakia featured some institutional forms of differentiation among its component parts, its leaders still retained informal elements of the imperial toolkit for political stabilization. Obviously, they served a dual purpose, first as political control mechanisms of the central governments and also as means of adaptations from the side of local (or minority) elites after the demise of the empire, while also facilitating the interpenetration of state and politics at the higher levels. This re-emergence was very much rooted in the existing Habsburg legacy, the provincial reorganization of Czechoslovakia being probably an exception. Key ministries—and the ones that before 1918 belonged to the exclusive jurisdiction of the emperor such as foreign affairs and defence—were held for a long time by the same politicians.[47] Sudetengermans were involved in government without receiving the legal autonomy they demanded but resembling the

Landsmannminister formula of Cisleithanian governments. The (in)famous Petka, the informal coordination mechanism of Czechoslovakist parties not only continued the coordination along ethnic lines that was characteristic for the Reichsrat and the Czech Diet, but it also helped the installation of governments run by civil officials, another tradition inherited from dualist Austria.[48] Hungarians were invited to become members of Czechoslovakist parties and through this channel influence decisions (although not with much success),[49] while, in many smaller cities, local minority elites established city parties, that were presumably apolitical and capable to transcend ethnic boundaries among locals, always open towards negotiating with the local representatives of the governing parties. Intellectuals in Prekmurje initiated a regional party, while Hungarians from what is known today as Voivodina were forced to accept the harsh reality of only being allowed to play a political role within a Serbian party.

The most intriguing example for such an informal compromise is Maramureș in Romania. The Romanian National Party, the one that dominated political life between 1922 and 1928 and again between 1933 and 1937, had no significant presence in this peculiar area, where even Romanian, Greek Catholic nobility was Magyarophile and loyal to Hungary up to the last moment. The local Romanian elites could, however, swiftly transition to Romania, retaining their positions within the administration and giving most of the county prefects. They were mainly challenged by Romanian nationalists from Transylvania, who promoted Transylvanian regionalism against the liberals, but who saw Maramureș as a region to re-Romanianize. Thus, the Maramureș Romanian elites, whose social practices did not change much and were regularly denounced as Hungarians, concluded a political alliance with the liberals that enabled them to continue where they left in November 1918. The same people run the new state just as they did the old one, and they established the same relation with the government and the state centre.[50]

This is also the case that highlights the most palpably why it was essential for the new states to rely on imperial legacies more often than it was presumed or alluded to in the era of dominant nationalist political discourse. The distance between the normative nation-state and the social realities was hard to bridge without the cooperation of the local and regional elites, while those elites valued stability after the convulsions of war and revolution. With the impossible task of unification at hand, facing the limits of their power and resources, it was also the easiest, probably even the only way to gloss over the shortcomings of their nationhood and bind the disparate regions that came under their rule. Imperial legacies were in this regard, or at least this kind of imperial legacies and those who were experts with them no unwelcome burden, but an asset that provided resources for state-survival and development.

However, the cases of Czechoslovakia and Romania illustrate overlapping, and still different models of how these legacies were applied and resorted to. The issue at stake was to manage state-society relationship to provide a forum of and platform(s) for interpenetration for a diverse society and its different groups of interests that were often divided by geography too. The main reason it happened usually informally was the concept of the nation-state that hindered even the federalization of Czechoslovakia, whose founders promoted federalism prior to 1918. But the composite nature of the new states had its role too.[51] Finally, the new states envisaged and promised a more democratic politics, involving the masses, which was—however—in contradiction with such political goals as enlightened expert governance, homogenization, unification, and prioritizing the titular nation.

At the highest level, both states elide on traditions of their elites, in the Czechoslovak case meticulously designed for a communication between administration and politics, but also the stuffing of public institutions according to party loyalty, and some devolution which was

accompanied by political representation for ethnic and political minorities. In Romania, it was the tradition of backroom deals and the use of royal prerogatives in favour of the ruling party that the National Liberal Party relied upon, as they wanted to overcome the composite nature of Greater Romania as soon as it was possible. Institutional differentiation was something to reduce and eliminate and soon off the table.[52]

But, on the lower levels, the practices to ensure some acceptance from the people were surprisingly similar—at least in terms of what they meant as the people's experience of the state. Ad hoc settlements and the use of precious local knowledge figured in this toolkit, at least as long the new states could breed loyal national elites at the local level too, with one significant difference: for Old Kingdom Romanians, it was hard to make a pretence of civilizational or cultural superiority in the former Austro-Hungarian provinces, while Czechs too easily saw the new territories as in need of thorough cultural ploughing. Thus, in Czechoslovakia, imperial rule was more often a mutual intention than in Romania, where it was seen as a kind of last resort. Nevertheless, the primary method of adjusting the centralized state to local needs remained the same: to interact with representatives of interest groups and local elites and co-opt them as much as possible.

Conclusion

Maybe it is time to return to Francis Joseph still lying on the ground (or already disappeared in the fog of history?). While it is easy to see his bronze figure as a symbol of the tragedy that befell to Austria-Hungary and a burden on the new Romania, from the perspective of imperial legacies, there was not much change to the statue in 1919 and afterwards. The statue has originally embodied an informal compromise, a means of differentiated rule from the very

beginning. In most cities of dualist Hungary, it was his archenemy, Lajos Kossuth, whose figure occupied such places of pride, while here the government in which Kossuth's son, Ferenc was a key minister, embraced wholeheartedly the monarch's figure as it was the way to symbolically bound his loyal borderers. In exchange, the local Romanian and German elites demonstrated their loyalty with withstanding the allure of Romanian nationalists who organized a peasant demonstration against the statue. Removing it from the pedestal changed its visibility, its symbolic power, but held in the storerooms of the key local civic association it still preserved its more subtle message about the limits of his empire and its successor states.

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Notes

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