

KISEBBSÉGI KÉRDÉSEK
A MAGYAR–ROMÁN DIPLOMÁCIAI
KAPCSOLATOKBAN
(1920–1931)

Dokumentumok

Válogatta, jegyzetekkel ellátta, a bevezető tanulmányt írta:

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Minority Issues In Hungarian–Romanian Diplomatic Relations (1920–1931)

D o c u m e n t s

*'Out of the blood our fathers shed in battles
flows peace, through our remembrance and regard,
creating order in our common matters,
this is our task, we know it will be hard.'*

(Attila József: By the Danube – excerpt;

Translated by Peter Zollman)

Following the First World War, new states were formed after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, state borders significantly changed compared to the previous ones. Due to the rearrangement of the borders – after Germans and Ukrainians – Hungarians became one of the most significant minorities in the region and the Romanian Hungarian minority became the greatest in numbers across the border.

The engine of Hungarian foreign policy between the two world wars was modern nationalism that intensified as a result of the shock of Trianon, which was embodied not only in the creation of the legitimacy of the state, but also in the revision as well as the Hungarian minority issue across the border.

In the Hungarian–Romanian diplomatic relations, it was not the representatives of two equal states who negotiated with each other, but the diplomatic struggle of a *defeated small state who was not willing to accept or even acknowledge the status quo* and a *victorious middle-sized state who was interested in maintaining the status quo*. From the beginning of the 19th century, the main issue of the Hungarian–Romanian diplomatic relations was the struggle for the exclusive possession of the multi-ethnic Transylvania. Thus, even in the period between the two world wars, the focus of the relationship of the two states was the affiliation of Transylvania in addition to the minority issues. In such situation, there was/could be little chance of reaching an agreement or finding a compromise.

When examining the relationship between the two states, we consider the aspects formulated by Árpád Hornyák, a historian, who deals with Hungarian–Serbian relations. The first aspect is the question of borders, the relation to them. Although some Romanian political circles could have imagined the border between the two countries at River Tisza, they were still satisfied with borders drawn in Trianon; at the same time, they knew that Hungary considered them unfair and sought to change them. Therefore, Romania had not only satisfaction with the borders, but also a fear of when they would be changed. This sense of fear determined the relationship with Hungary and the attitude towards the Hungarian

minority, too. As a result, Romanian foreign affairs paid special attention to Hungarian political manifestations and its primary aim was to weaken the ties between Hungary and the Hungarian minority. Miklós Horthy's statement from 1921 expresses the standpoint of Hungary very clearly: 'As long as the Romanians are stronger than us, they will own Transylvania. If, on the other hand, Hungarians are stronger than the Romanians, they will take Transylvania away from us. Since this is a clear situation, any kind of negotiation is pointless.' Thus, the judgement of the boundary lines resulted in an almost irreconcilable contradiction between the two states.

The second aspect of the interstate relations is the weight the other state has in pursuing its own national interests. Since in 1921, the ring of the Little Entente was closed around and against Hungary, Romania did not consider Hungary in a way that it can be a partner in the realisation of its national interests. Theoretically, a kind of cooperation would have been possible against the German and Slavic threat and expansion, however, the almost antagonistic opposition between the two countries prevented this. In 1920/21, the plan of a personal union emerged on the Hungarian side during the reign of the Romanian king, but it was inadmissible on the Romanian side, mainly because Hungary would have asked for the independent duchy of Transylvania in return. After 1921, Hungary did not attach significance to Romania in the realisation of national interests.

The third aspect is the weight of the minorities, their treatment and the attitude of the motherland towards them, so in fact the application of Rogers Brubaker's Triangular configuration (national minorities, nationalising state, external national 'homeland') in the examination of the system of relations. Neither in number, nor in proportion did Romanian Hungarians and Hungarian Romanians have the same weight. The one and a half million Hungarians made up approximately 8% of the Romanian population, while the 23 thousand Romanians made up 0.3% of the population of Hungary. This grand difference can be observed through diplomatic documents as well. The Hungarian diplomatic documents are much more about minority issues than Romanian diplomatic sources. Rarely do we find Romanian reports that describe the situation of Romanians in Hungary. This asymmetry also meant that minority issues, although they were important for Hungary, could not have a positive effect on the relations between the two countries, not only because the Hungarian narrative was based on grievances, but also due to the difference in weight. The Romanian narrative was based on grievances too, but primarily not in relation to Hungarian Romanians, but in relation to the irredentism in Hungary and Transylvania. Instead of real dialogues, miscommunication characterised the diplomatic discourse. Moreover, the system of minority protection between the two world wars was not strong enough to achieve substantive result in the conflicts between the two states.

The fourth aspect is the economic relations, which are strongly influenced by the economic interdependence of the two countries. Prime Minister István Bethlen repeatedly emphasized that there is a possibility of improving the Hungarian – Romanian relations in economic and commercial fields. And indeed, in 1924, an agreement was signed in Bucharest regarding pending economic, financial, reparation, transportation and postal issues. Hungary imported a significant amount of crude oil from Romania, covered its entire

salt needs from there and most of its wood also came from there. In exchange, Hungary exported mechanical and light industrial products. However, strong trade relations did not substantially affect political relations.

Finally the fifth, but still really important aspect is the place of the two countries in the system of relations. It is widely known that the bilateral relation cannot be interpreted in itself, nor is its possibilities merely a function of the relationship between the two states. From this viewpoint, we can declare that when international conditions desired so, there could have been a chance for an agreement. Due to the geopolitical situation, the relation to the Soviet Union was significant. Because of Bessarabia, the Romanian – Soviet relation between the entire two world wars was characterised by tension, and the Horthy Era Hungary isolated itself from the Soviet Union due to the memory of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the threat of Bolshevism. Therefore, it was the common enemy of Budapest and Bucharest, and Italy and Germany can be concluded as common friends, however, a more important circumstance was that the alliance of the Little Entente, which was strongly influenced by France, was inseparable. Hungarian politicians knew very well that they could succeed by disintegrating the Little Entente, but these kinds of efforts remained practically ineffective.

In this book, I present the German influence on the relations between the two countries. Until 1929, in the German foreign policy, the *Südostraum* was only of secondary importance after French relations. Stresemann's policy of fulfilment did not specifically deal with this region, he did not want to burden the relations especially with the minority issue. Although, we must also add that the situation of Czechoslovakian and Polish Germans indeed interested German foreign policy mostly because of territorial questions. Berlin had less influence yet on the situation of Germans living further east at that time. We know from literature that Romania and Yugoslavia were important for Germany rather commercially, and from this point of view we can ask the question: how did the Weimar policy affect the Hungarian–Romanian relationship?

This book is a work on the history of diplomacy, which aims to investigate the diplomatic relations of Hungary and Romania and the emergence of the minority issue between 1920 and 1931 from a political perspective. An important element of diplomatic relations is the economic and military relations between the two countries, however, we do not deal with this aspect in this book. Although there can be found economic themed sources too, but they all have a minority aspect as well.

The source collection contains 218 selected sources from foreign archives/documents of Budapest, Bucharest and Berlin. The aspect of the selection was that the given source should provide as comprehensive insight into the problem as possible. Another aspect was to include sources in the selection that discuss minority issues or tense issues between Hungary and Romania. Exceptions are sources in the selection that are about the situation of foreign policy or reflect on an important foreign policy event. Such are the Hungarian–Italian rapprochement and the Treaty of Friendship, as well as the Hungarian–French rapprochement.

The time limits indicate that this work is the result of conscious research from Hungarian viewpoint, as 1931 – end of Bethlen’s ten-year consolidation – marks the end of the period from the perspective of Hungarian public history and is not the turning point of Romanian politics. Therefore, the Bethlen Era portrays the struggle of Hungarian–Romanian diplomatics. The border at 1920 is justified since it was the time when the first steps of diplomatic contact took place and from January 1921, we can talk about official Hungarian–Romanian diplomatic relations.

We base our research on the already well-known domestic and international literature. We examine key issues with the props of political and diplomatic history. The horizon of the topic is given by of course the evolution of international politics, and we place the bilateral relations between the two countries, Hungary and Romania, into it.

The system of relations is multi-layered. In order to investigate the minority issue, it is essential that we assess the system of relations that connected the official Hungarian foreign affairs service and the leaders of Romanian Hungarians. This – mainly based on research by Nándor Bárdi and Béla György – already has usable antecedents. The next contacting point is the connection between the foreign service and Romanian royal and governmental circles. The third interface is the examination of relations between Hungarian diplomacy and the diplomacy of other countries in Bucharest.

We have to examine these same relations in the case of the official Romanian foreign affairs service too (their relationship with Hungarian Romanians, the Hungarian government and other diplomatic representations in Hungary).

There was little chance of remedying the grievances of minorities in bilateral relations, officially they could turn to the League of Nations. It is not our intention to present the process of minority petitions that got to the League of Nations, as it has already been and is being dealt with by other research. On the other hand, we consider it necessary how the administration of League of Nations evolved in bilateral relations and what consequences it had. Another, not so official method for remedying the grievances was the foreign propaganda. With that, there may have been some chance for putting pressure. Therefore, it is important to look at the extent to which diplomats provided background material for foreign propaganda and, if it was necessary, how they silenced or amplified it.

There were some minority affairs that went beyond the relationship of the two countries. Such as the concordat-case, which was on the agenda almost throughout the period under review. The diplomacy of Vatican played a great role in it.

I hope that I can facilitate further research with this source publication. I think that the selected documents can serve as a starting point for more in-depth research on a subtopic. I believe that the presentation of the question *sine ira et studio* can facilitate the professional rapprochement between Hungarian and Romanian historians, which could be a step towards dampening the edge of the Hungarian – Romanian division that still have been existing even after 100 years, and towards the desired reconciliation and neighbourliness on both sides.