

THE IMPACT OF 1956 ON THE HUNGARIANS OF TRANSYLVANIA

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“The Impact of 1956 on the Hungarians of Transylvania”, provides a 50-year retrospective analysis of the political consequences of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on the Hungarians in neighboring Romania. It focuses on the inter-ethnic knock-on effects in the Romanian Workers Party, the “Hungarian/Mures-Hungarian Autonomous Region” of Transylvania, and the cultural institutions of the Hungarian minority. It links these developments to present-day Romanian-Hungarian relations, both on the interstate and the intrastate levels.

Keywords: Transylvania, 1956, Hungarian minority, Bolyai University, Romania, Romanian Workers’ Party

The Hungarian “Fight for Freedom of 1956” had dramatic consequences not only for the people of Hungary but for the Hungarians in neighboring states. It is the concern of this paper to focus on the consequences of 1956 on the lives of Hungarians in Transylvania, within the Peoples’ Republic of Romania.

I have chosen this topic because very little has appeared about it in English or other “world” languages. Since 1989 many studies and documents have been published in Hungarian on this subject, but very little of this awareness has been transmitted beyond the Carpathian Basin. Thus, even among policymakers and academicians there is confusion and outright ignorance about 1956 and its cross-border effects in East-Central Europe.

I have selected Transylvania for my focus, because it is the area that witnessed the most far-reaching consequences, but which still has a wealth of literature and documentation in Hungarian. My objective at present is simply to provide a synthesis of these findings, an overview which will guide others to focus on this issue with the attention that it truly deserves. The subject deserves such attention because 1956 was the catalyst and the catharsis that has defined Hungarian-Romanian relations ever since on both intra-state and interstate levels.

The Hungarian literature and documentation has appeared in the publications of the Teleki László Foundation and the 1956 Institute, as well as a few maverick

sources in the West. The most ambitious compilations have been those of Zoltán Tófalvi, Ágoston Székelyhidi, Ádám Szesztay, László Diószegi, Andrea R. Süle, Kálmán Csiha, András Bodor, István Fehér, Ildikó Lipcsey, and Anna P. Sebők.¹

It is particularly important to link 1956 to Romanian-Hungarian relations, because like the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 the history of twentieth-century Transylvania is defined by these two events. 1920 witnessed the transfer of sovereignty over Transylvania to the Romanian state, which came out of World War I as the major recipient of Entente, particularly French, largesse. The context of this decision reflected the will and perceptions of the victorious powers then. In 1947 the post-World War II decisions simply reinforced this earlier decision. As opposed to this, 1956, more than any other event, rehabilitated the Hungarians in the eyes of the Western world. Yet, while 1956 was a peak event for Hungarians as a whole, it was followed by devastating consequences for the Hungarians of Transylvania. 1956 provided both the pretext and the opportunity to dismantle Hungarian cultural institutions and communal solidarity in Romania.

Antecedents

Before we turn to an analysis of these developments, it is important to remind ourselves of the nature of the Transylvanian situation in the decade preceding 1956. The urban scene was still overwhelmingly Hungarian in most of Northern Transylvania. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Kolozsvár/Cluj was a predominantly Hungarian city. Even on the eve of the revolution, this city was still 50.3% Hungarian and only 48.2% Romanian.² Furthermore, its institutional profile still included the independent Bolyai University, which provided an organized framework for Hungarian higher education. This provided the Hungarian minority with a self-conscious and properly trained elite.

While Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the Romanian Worker's Party, was committed to breaking/undermining the major strongholds of the Transylvanian Hungarian community, he could do so only after the consolidation of ethnic Romanian control over the Romanian Communist Party (at this point called the Romanian Worker's Party). This was accomplished through a patient application of Lenin's "two steps forward, one step back" tactical advice. After all, the Party – the Soviet "control-system" – needed the nationalities in the first stages of capturing and consolidating their power in Romania.

The communist seizure of power in Romania was complete with Petru Groza's ascendancy on March 5, 1945, but it was technically confirmed only with the abdication of King Michael in December 1947. In these years Romania was transformed into a "People's Democracy". One of the most important tactics utilized to attain this end was the nationalities policy of the Party, dedicated to the tenets of

“proletarian internationalism” and the eradication of the abuses and persecutions suffered by the country’s national minorities in the days of “bourgeois chauvinism”.³ But while this policy – the eradication of nationalism – was being carried to fulfillment, the growth of the RWP, its changing ethnic composition and organization, was foreboding for future developments for these same national minorities and revealed developments that were far from promising.

The most dramatic development having long-range affects on the position of the country’s ethnic minorities and on the resurgence of nationalism was the rapid growth of the RWP following the seizure of power. From a minuscule Party of around 1,000 members in April 1944, the Party grew to 217,000 members by September 1945. This growth accelerated and by June 1947 there were 710,000 members. In this early phase of its development it reached a total of 937,846 members by the September of 1948 with the absorption of the Social Democrats. This was followed by a series of purges (to be discussed below), which consolidated the Party membership at 580,000 in June 1956, just a few months before the Revolution erupted in Hungary.⁴ The rapid growth of the Party, particularly in the years up to 1948 drastically altered its ethnic make-up. This growth relegated the ethnic minority Party members – who in the past composed the bulk of the RWP – into a secondary position, as Party ranks were swelled by ethnic Romanians who had seen “the handwriting on the wall”.⁵

This rapid post-war growth of the Party was the first major step toward its “nationalization”. After 1948, however, the RWP stabilized its membership and carried out purges among elements that it regarded as “unhealthy”. Even these purges, however, caused the greatest damage not in the ranks of the newly recruited ethnic Romanians, but in the ranks of the veteran ethnic minority Communists.⁶ Thus, both the growth and the purges of the Party contributed to the strengthening of the ethnic Romanian sectors of the RWP. The increases in Party membership accentuated this trend.⁷ The regime’s search for popularity among the masses allowed it to lower its standards for membership. This enabled many to join who were ignorant of, if not hostile to, the tenets of “proletarian internationalism” and the traditional policies of “minority tolerance”, which had prevailed prior to this growth in Party membership.

The resurgence of nationalism can be partly explained by the decimation of the de-nationalized elements, which had composed the bulk of the RWP before 1944. Membership in the Party prior to the seizure of power was predominantly “internationalist”, composed of individuals who were for the most part non-Romanians ethnically.⁸ Historical reasons determined this adhesion of minorities to the RWP, some of which have already been touched on above. It is the purpose of this study to examine briefly the composition of the RWP prior to the seizure of power, as well as after its “nationalization”.

Before the seizure of power the growth and composition of the Party can be divided by the historic Fifth Party Congress of 1932.⁹ Up to this Congress, the national minorities dominated the RWP. Jews and Ukrainians from Bessarabia, Bulgarians from Dobrogea, and Jews and Hungarians from Transylvania outnumbered at this stage the ethnic Romanians in the positions of leadership as well as in the number of Party members.¹⁰ From 1932 onwards, however, the ethnic Romanians began to play a prominent part in the Party's leadership although they were still not the dominant sector of the Party membership.

The Party of the inter-war years was made up of roughly two groups. One group was composed of national minority intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals. The other group was composed of ethnic Romanian laborers.¹¹ Of the two groups the former seems to have been more important until the Party Congress of 1932. They were a heterogeneous lot made up of a variety of nationalities drawn from all classes and practically all professions. As opposed to this, the ethnic Romanian sector of the Party was in all ways more homogeneous. Not only were they similar in national origin, but their class and labor background gave them more social solidarity and political cohesion. Their role became more important following the Fifth Party Congress, the Grivița Strike of 1933, and the emergence of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as secretary-general of the RWP.¹²

The RWP after the Seizure of Power

After August 1944 the RWP underwent a vast change in composition. This change took place on all levels of the Party hierarchy from the Politburo down to the local cell organizations. This change has brought about a real "nationalization" of the Party along ethnic lines.¹³ To understand this nationalization it will be necessary to examine not only all levels of the Party hierarchy, but also the fragmentation of the Party leadership following the seizure of power. This fragmentation of the leadership followed the general pattern of other East European satellites, and reflects the division of the Party into "Muscovites", "westerners", and "home" communists.

The "Muscovites" composed perhaps the most "alien" (i.e., non-Romanian) segment of the RWP not only because of their heterogeneous national backgrounds, but also because their first loyalty was always to the Kremlin center and the international at the expense of Romanian needs or capabilities.¹⁴ This group was represented by such well-known individuals as Ana Pauker, Leonte Rautu, Vasile Luka, Dumitru Coliu, and Emil Bodnaras. They were a "rootless" group who were often at odds with one another as well as with the "home" and "western" communists. What gave them their uniting label was that they had spent most of World War II as well as some of the inter-war years in the Soviet Union under the

tutorship of Stalin. They returned to Romania on the coat-tails of the Red Army to assist and carry to fulfillment the communization of the country.¹⁵

The “westerners” were the smallest of the three above mentioned groups and also the least significant. They resembled the “Muscovites” in a number of ways, yet they were distrusted by Stalin. Like the “Muscovites” they were also recruited predominantly from among the national minorities. Such individuals as Gheorghe Gaston-Marin and Petre Borila represent this group.¹⁶

Their major – perhaps only – unifying characteristic is that they had spent the war years or part of the 1930’s in the West, taking part in the Spanish Civil War or later in the resistance movement in France. Like the “Muscovites” they too returned to Romania at the close of hostilities to take part in the communization of the country.

Unlike the above two groups, the “home” communists in Romania were predominantly (on the leadership level) of Romanian ethnic stock. They had spent the war years as well as most of the inter-war years in Romanian prisons. Although they were relatively a more homogeneous lot than the former two groups, they were by no means united in outlook. Individuals like Gheorghiu-Dej, Apostol, Patrascanu, Ceaușescu, Maurer, Dalea, Moghioros, and Draghici made up this group.¹⁷ While most of them had similar social origins and “religious” backgrounds, their unifying characteristic was that they had spent the inhospitable inter-war years, as well as World War II, in the country.¹⁸ They were, in this sense, the group that was welded together most through a common past of travail and persecution at the hands of the “bourgeois” and “fascist” authorities.

From these various elements – “Muscovites”, “westerners”, and “home” – the leadership of the RWP was forged in the immediate post-war years. However, the amalgamation of such diverse elements was bound not to last. Even during the lifetime of Stalin – who had imposed unity on these elements in the first place¹⁹ – the instability of the Party’s composition demanded internal alterations. These alterations were provided by a number of purges, of which the Patrascanu purge of 1948 and the Pauker-Luka-Georgescu purge of 1952 stand out as the most important.²⁰ These early purges were later (1957) augmented by the Constantinescu-Chisinevski purge which followed close on the de-Stalinization policies of the bloc,²¹ though ideologically not directly related to them.

The composition of the RWP reflected the change wrought by these purges. The change had “Romanianized” the Party in the true sense of the word at the top levels of power. It eliminated the most “foreign” members from the Party power-structure. Thus, the “aliens” (Pauker, Luka, Georgescu, Chisinevski, Foris, Koffler and numerous lesser figures) received the ax together with a few “natives” like Patrascanu and Constantinescu. The net result has been to consolidate within the Politburo and the Secretariat the position of the ethnic Romanian Party leaders, who had grouped themselves around Gheorghiu-Dej.²²

Homogenization Begins

This Romanianized RWP under Gheorghiu-Dej then undertook the task to begin the homogenization of Romania's population. By 1956 he had achieved two goals that he had set for himself in 1945; he had broken the back of the old Romanian elite, and he had eliminated his major opponents from the Party leadership. He could now undertake the challenge of assimilating the minority nationalities, particularly the Hungarians of Transylvania.²³ Even before Stalin died, in January 1953 he had declared that the "nationality question has been solved in Romania".²⁴ In Romania Stalinism was institutionalized even without Stalin. Even in 1956 after the Soviet XXth Party Congress, de-Stalinization did not take place. Gheorghiu-Dej categorically rejected the need to exercise self-criticism, which had been timidly broached by a minuscule minority of the Party's higher echelon, including Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chisinevski. Among the reform communists, among the Hungarians of Romania, the XXth Party Congress and the program of the Imre Nagy government had a more far-reaching impact. In March, László Szabédi, instructor at the Bolyai University, already raised the question of equal opportunity for Hungarians.²⁵

Romanians needed to make concessions in a few concrete cases. In July 1956 a resolution was circulated about the need to raise standards of instruction. Other verbal commitments were made for additional instructional and cultural opportunities. Plans were underway for reestablishing Hungarian museums in cities like Nagyszalonta. Articles appeared in *Előre*, the government run daily newspaper, promising that the Arad memorial for the martyred heroes of 1849 would finally be refurbished. (These had been taken down in 1925!) Some new minority periodicals also began publication, and there were promises of additional book publishing opportunities as well.²⁶ All this, however, was simply the "one step back". The Revolution of 1956 provided Gheorghiu-Dej with the opportunity to take the next "two steps forward!"

It is in this context that the Bolyai University now was targeted for elimination. It had survived World War II. It officially became the Universitatea Bolyai din Cluj (The Bolyai University of Cluj) in 1946. It survived because it was in the interest of the Petru Groza administration to placate the Hungarian minority. In this way he could assure their support for his administration. At the same time it was useful to demonstrate to the outside world that Romania was pursuing a tolerant policy toward its minorities. The negotiations in Paris leading to the Peace Treaty were in part concerned about the future fate of Northern Transylvania.²⁷ Would it remain with Romania or would part of it be returned to Hungary? Apparently, the retention of the Bolyai University was a convincing argument – used by Foreign Minister Tatarescu – to allow Romania to retain all of Transylvania.

Unfortunately, the Bolyai University did not long survive the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty. Within a decade it was divided, reduced and finally by 1959 absorbed by the Romanian Babeş University. This process was carried out in a series of campaigns, which culminated in the institution's Romanianization.

One could argue that Romania under both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceauşescu perfected the "salami tactics" system of Mátyás Rákosi, at least in the way in which they systematically undermined Hungarian instruction at the university level. As we have shown above, the nationality policy of the 1944–1947 years responded primarily to Romania's desire to retain all of Transylvania. With this in mind all kinds of temporary concessions were made to the minorities. The nationality policy also responded to Soviet hegemonial demands, to assure that a communist government would come to power in Romania. Playing on the insecurities of the minorities helped the Communists to power. This required concessions such as the "Nationality Statute" and the protection of minority-language institutions, including the Bolyai University.²⁸

The relative enlightenment in minority-majority relations was also due to two other factors. One was the role of Petru Groza, the other was the over-representation of the minorities in the Party organization at higher levels of the hierarchy. At least this was the case in 1946–1947, and it also remained characteristic to a more limited extent from 1947 to 1952. While Groza was influential in policymaking, the minorities fared much better. His outlook was colored by tolerance for diversity and respect for the cultural contributions of all nationalities. In relation to the Bolyai University this was clearly demonstrated by his support in 1945 of the retention of thirty instructors, who had Hungarian rather than Romanian citizenship prior to 1940.²⁹ However, as Groza lost his influence and the Party apparatchiks around Gheorghiu-Dej gained influence, he was less able to stem the tide of Romanian ethnocentrism.

The changed complexion of the leadership in the Romanian power-structure set the stage for the "salami tactics" that characterized the Romanianization of all aspects of minority life. This process of planned corrosion began almost at the moment that the regime issued the charter for the Bolyai University's right to exist. It could be argued, perhaps, that this first stage was not a consequence of Party planning, but the result of the passive resistance of the Romanian academicians, who did not want to see a Hungarian University in Cluj. The most direct result of this resistance is that the university buildings were *not* shared. The Hungarians had to move out, and they could not find facilities large enough to house their institution. This forced them to divide the institution, leaving the legal, humanistic, and social science sections in Cluj, while the Medical and Pharmaceutical sections moved to Marosvásárhely/Tîrgu-Mureş.³⁰ This initial forced division of the University was made official in 1948 when the Medical and Pharmaceutical college was made independent of the Bolyai University by political decree.³¹

Parallel to this development, the university-level instruction of the institution was also undermined. Under the pretext of paying greater heed to ideological commitments, the instructors who did not have Romanian citizenship prior to 1940, were now terminated by non-renewal of their contracts. This meant that some of the most well-known scholars could no longer teach at the Bolyai University. A similar process of “weeding” or “purging” also took its toll among the Hungarian instructors with Romanian citizenship. Some of the finest instructors were charged with being “clerical reactionaries”. While most were purged in this fashion during the early 1950s, some had already suffered termination as early as 1947.³²

It is true that the instructors of the Romanian Babeş University also suffered during these Stalinist purges. However, a close comparison of the effects of these purges shows that the damage done to the Bolyai University was much more severe. It disrupted continuity of instruction and undermined the quality of education. It also instilled a constant sense of insecurity among the students, not just in terms of their personal existence, but in terms of the survival of the Bolyai University. This was accentuated by the recruitment of “politically reliable” replacements, who were not competent in the areas or courses they were supposed to teach.³³

Of all the Hungarian minorities in East Central Europe, the Transylvanian Hungarians were perhaps most adversely affected by the 1956 Revolution, both immediately and in the long run.³⁴ Until 1956-58 they had an extensive network of cultural and educational institutions. From this time on these institutions and associated opportunities became the target of cutbacks, outright abolition, or gradual erosion. For the Transylvanian Hungarians 1956 was the beginning of extensive discrimination and even repression based on their national origin and sense of solidarity with the Hungarians of Hungary.

During the next two years the Romanian leadership undertook a systematic propaganda campaign to discredit the Revolution and its Transylvanian sympathizers. The Revolution was presented as a throwback to the “Horthyist”, “fascist” past that would have become a threat to the territorial integrity of Romania.³⁵ Again, the mood that was activated related more to the knee-jerk reactions of the Little Entente than to the quest for “socialist solidarity”. This campaign came to a head a week before the first anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, when the Party held a meeting of intellectuals at Cluj.³⁶ At this meeting the Hungarian intellectuals, headed by Lajos Jordáky, engaged in self-criticism of their behavior during the previous October. They admitted having succumbed to nationalism and having sympathized with the actions of Imre Nagy and other leaders of the “counterrevolution”.³⁷ In effect, this meeting documented the “nationalism” and “isolationism” of the Transylvanian Hungarians even at the highest levels.

The Romanian leaders began to move against this threat of “nationalism” at the first opportunity. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in the summer of 1958 meant that the last impediment to Romanian nationalist revival had been removed.³⁸ Gheorghiu-Dej and his faction of the leadership immediately set about dismantling the Hungarians’ remaining cultural institutions. The first major blow was aimed at the Bolyai University, which was merged with the Romanian Babeş University.³⁹

Actually, the merger of the two institutions was already contemplated before the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.⁴⁰ However, the uprising provided it with a pretext, which would enable the Party leaders to speed up the process of “unification”. During the 1955–1956 academic year visits by important party leaders to Cluj and the Bolyai University, hinted that the Romanian leadership was thinking of “alternative options”. Leonte Rautu of the Executive Committee and Miron Constantinescu visited with the university’s administrators raising questions about the placement of graduates and the “excessive” time devoted to Hungarian literature in the curriculum.⁴¹ Also, during the summer of 1956 steps were taken to terminate the instruction of history in Hungarian. Although the university was able to stall implementation of this, it was not able to avoid the Party’s directives to hold round table discussions with administrators and instructors from the Romanian Babes University, which became regular weekly occurrences at the Continental Hotel.⁴²

After the Revolution in Hungary broke out during October 1956 everything accelerated.⁴³ Under trumped-up charges of sympathizing with the revolution they fired a number of instructors in the Social Studies fields (Géza Saszet, Edit Keszi Harmat, etc.) and arrested a group of students in the history department. Then a brief lull followed until March 1958, when more arrests and trials took place. The Dobai-Komáromi trial was followed by the arrest of talented young university instructors, including Gyula Dávid, Elemér Lakó and János Varró. They were accused of counter-revolutionary agitation for having visited the graves of the poets Sándor Reményik and Jenő Dsida during October 1956, singing and reciting their poems. The well-known professor Lajos Jordáky was also arrested at this time, as were many students in the Department of Hungarian Studies.⁴⁴

Then a meeting of the Bolyai student body was called, at which representatives of the Young Communist League from Bucharest also participated. Provocative questions were asked of the students, and emotions ran high. Eight students were arrested and one of them was given a twelve-year prison sentence. A few days later the University was visited by Virgil Trofin, the Central Committee member with responsibility for youth affairs. For “weakness and indecisiveness” he had both the Dean (András Bodor) and Assistant Dean (Zoltán Náhlik) removed from their positions.⁴⁵

The next step was to go public with the “Hungarian problem”. This took place on February 18-22, 1959 at the Bucharest Conference of the Romanian Student Association.⁴⁶ A high-powered government delegation was present at the meeting including General Secretary of the Party Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the Minister of Education Athanasie Joja. Gheorghiu-Dej denounced “isolationism” and said that steps must be taken to eradicate the remnants of “national antagonisms”. This could only be achieved by bringing all students of all nationalities together in one institution, where they can build Socialism together as a united and patriotic people. All the people who spoke up favored the unification of universities and schools. Minister of Education Joja added that even beyond the classroom, it was important to give students a sense of national unity via common dormitories and other common activities.⁴⁷

On February 23rd the Administration of the Bolyai University called a meeting of the University Council. The Rector presided and stated that the Assistant Rector would make a statement that could not be discussed or questioned. The Assistant Rector then stated that the Party and the Ministry of Education had decided – on the basis of the demands of students from both universities – to unite the two universities of Cluj. Pandemonium broke out in the chamber, but the Rector refused to allow anyone to speak. He simply concluded the meeting by saying that this decision is in the best interest of all concerned, it will allow for teaching of all courses in Hungarian as well as Romanian and at half the cost because it will reduce administrative and other forms of duplication. He also called on everyone to support the Party and government decision with their active participation in the scheduled unification meetings.⁴⁸

These meetings began on February 26 and continued until March 5 almost in marathon fashion. The objective of these meetings was to build public support for the Party’s decision and to isolate those who were opposed to it. For this reason the Party sent many of its influential leaders to these public sessions, including Nicolae Ceaușescu, a member of the Presidium, the Minister of Education Joja, Ion Iliescu, the president of the Romanian Student Federation (and two-term President of Romania after Ceaușescu’s fall), and many others. Speakers followed one another in a steady stream applauding the Party’s decision to “merge” the two universities. In this atmosphere only three members of the Bolyai staff dared to speak up against the unification: Edgár Balogh, István Nagy and László Szabédi.⁴⁹

The public meetings were then used to bring pressure on those who were still hesitant or noncommittal about this decision. Nicolae Ceaușescu personally guided the intimidation of the individuals who opposed the decision. He harangued those present by saying that no one should live under the illusion that a Swiss model was applicable to Romania. No such “medieval” model was acceptable in sovereign Romania, where there was no room for Ghettos, and the “isola-

tion of nationalities". In Romania there was room only for one culture, a culture devoted to the construction of Socialism.⁵⁰

László Szabédi was picked out for particular pressure, because of his stature in the community and at the University. He did not break! When called by Ceaușescu to present his own views, he presented them in Hungarian as his colleague Lajos Nagy translated them into Romanian. Ceaușescu was livid and publicly castigated him. During subsequent evenings Szabédi was called in for questioning by the Securitate. This harassment convinced him that he could not alter the decision, but he refused to become a party to it. He committed suicide. On May 5 the Assistant Rector Zoltán Csendes and his wife followed his example.⁵¹

"Unification" in this psychological sense, was then followed by joint committee discussions between the two universities for the actual implementation of this decision. While the "charter" of the Bolyai University was never annulled, no legal document was drawn up to define the rights and obligations of the two institutions in the newly created "Babeș-Bolyai University". In this way no one could be held accountable for the failure to fulfill obligations. However, the joint committees did hammer out the future academic program in terms of language use in the classroom. Already in this "compromise" it became apparent that the Bolyai faculty and students would henceforth play second fiddle to the Babeș faculty and student body. Of all the courses offered at the new unified institution, 137 would be offered in Romanian, while only 43 would be in Hungarian. In some areas Hungarian was totally excluded (law and economics), while in others it was reduced to a few insignificant sections, which were totally eliminated by the middle of the 1980s.⁵² By the time of Ceaușescu's overthrow in December 1989 Hungarian instruction survived only in the pedagogical section for Hungarian literature and Hungarian language.

The fate of lower-level educational institutions followed the same pattern; they were not eliminated outright, but made subordinate parts of Romanian-language grade schools or high schools and subjected to administrative restrictions that undercut their status and standards. These considerations led many Hungarian students to take their classes in Romanian rather than in their mother tongue.⁵³ Thus, after 1958 the educational system became an unabashed instrument of Romanianization.

Parallel to the elimination of the most important Hungarian educational and cultural institutions, the RWP also began to isolate all those intellectuals who were too closely tied to their sense of national identity. On November 19, 1956 Nicolae Ceaușescu vehemently denounced "isolationism" and at the same time demanded that students fulfill their responsibilities as students, insisting that they should apply themselves to their studies rather than activism. The RWP, he said, was engaged in constructing factories, including cane processing plants, to which

all those students who do not fulfill their responsibilities were to be sent.⁵⁴ This was a pointed reference to forced labor in the Danube delta region.

Many, indeed, were sent to participate in such re-educational opportunities and many never returned from this experience. Already on December 5, 1956 the Central Committee received a report from Leonte Rauțu and János Fazekas, which followed up on Ceaușescu's demands. They had gone on a fact-finding trip to Cluj between November 23–26, 1956, focusing primarily on the activities of Hungarian intellectuals and the students of the Bolyai University. Their report included the observation that many of the intellectuals were infected by the developments in Hungary and were skeptical about the “mass basis” of the Kádár regime.⁵⁵ Even more disturbing was the attitude expressed by Professor Gyula Márton that the Hungarians of the Romanian People's Republic are really a part of the Hungarian nation. This attitude is a threat to the unity of the state and contradicts Marxism-Leninism. Furthermore, the students want independent student organizations unmonitored by the Party. They also want contact with international student organizations without restrictions. All these required a concerted response from the Party and the Securitate.⁵⁶

This response was not long in coming. In fact, some of the first arrests already preceded the Rauțu-Fazekas Report on October 25 when Imre Balázs and Tirnován Arisztid Vid were taken into custody. A year later they were both convicted of incitement and were given seven-year jail terms. On November 17 István Várhegyi was also arrested on the same charge and also given a seven-year term. These were merely the first of a long series of arrests and show trials that continued through the end of 1958. It is not coincidental that they were halted only with the merger of the Bolyai and Babeș universities on February 22, 1959.⁵⁷

Conclusion

While in the short-run 1956 led to retribution in Budapest as well as Kolozsvár/Cluj, in the long-run Hungarians tended to benefit from the glory and the global attention that went with heroic rebellion against the Soviet superpower. In Transylvania, on the other hand, the impact was negative in terms of both the short and long-run. It led to the reprisals of the Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu administrations. In the short-run long prison terms and forced labor for thousands followed. According to some estimates out of the approximately 30,000 citizens of Romania affected, close to one-third were Hungarians. Besides the executions and imprisonments, the Hungarian part of the population also lost its most influential cultural institution, the Bolyai University. However, other cultural and educational institutions were also eliminated between 1956 and 1959.

These developments were a direct consequence of the Romanianization of the RWP and the nationalist agendas of leaders like Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu. They were also possible because Soviet hegemonial interests were altered by 1956. The Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev altered its policies, utilizing indirect control rather than just military occupation. Thus, in the summer of 1958 the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory, enabled the leaders of the RWP to chart a more nationalistic course. They used 1956 as the pretext for their policies of Romanianization. The most devastating long-range consequences were the negative demographic and cultural inroads and the erosion of the Hungarian population's cultural institutions in Transylvania.

Notes

- ¹ Zoltán Tófalvi, "Kezdeményezések és szervezkedések Erdélyben" in Ágoston Székelyhidi (ed.) *Magyar '56* (Budapest: MVSz, 1996); Ádám Szesztay, "Nemzetiségi törekvések az 1956-os forradalomban", *Regio* No. 2 (1994); Kálmán Csiha, *Fény a rácsokon* (Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó, 1992); András Bodor, *A Bolyai Tudományegyetem 1945–1959* (Budapest: Bolyai Egyetem Barátainak Egyesülete, 1996); István Fehér, *Az utolsó percben: Magyarország nemzetiségei, 1945–1990* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1993); László Diószegi and Andrea R. Süle (eds.) *Hetven év: A romániai magyarság története* (Budapest: Magyarság-Kutató Intézet, 1990); Ildikó Lipcsey, "A forradalom hatása és következményei Erdélyben" M.S. in Teleki László Library Collection; and Anna P. Sebők, *Kolozsvári Perek, 1956* (Budapest: Károlyi Palota, Hamvas Intézet, 2001).
- ² "Statistical Studies on the Last Hundred Years in Central Europe", Mid-European Center, New York, 1968; Árpád E. Varga, *Fejezetek a jelenkori Erdély népesedéstörténetéből* (Budapest: Püski, 1998), pp. 262–263.
- ³ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1951), pp. 339–342.
- ⁴ *The Romanian Workers' Party on the eve of its third congress* (Special Report; Radio Free Europe, Munich, May, 1960), pp. 8–10; Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania 1944–1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 149–151, 204–215, 241–244; Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc* (Revised Paperback Edition; New York: Praeger, 1961), pp. 85–91; Randolph L. Braham, "Rumania: Onto the Separate Path", *Problems of Communism*, XIII (May–June, 1964), footnote 5, pp. 16–17.
- ⁵ Stephen Fischer-Galáti (Ed.) *Romania* (New York: Praeger, 1956), pp. 69–71; Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania* pp. 204–208; Robert R. King, *History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 1980), p. 64. RCP stands for Communist Party of Romania. This name will not be used throughout this study but rather the name adopted in 1948 at the time of the Communist "merger" with the Social Democrats. The name then adopted was Romanian Workers' Party (RWP).
- ⁶ This is verified by the fact that in December, 1955, 79.2% of the RWP members were ethnic Romanians. See *ibid.*, p. 243. By 1968, 88.43% were ethnic Romanians. Compare Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, p. 243, with "Report of Nicolae Ceaușescu on organizational measures for the steady strengthening of the moral-political unity of the working people", *Documents, Articles and Information on Romania*, No. 27 (Oct. 28, 1968), p. 30.
- ⁷ Braham, "Rumania: Onto the Separate Path", pp. 16–17.

- ⁸ Kofos, "Balkan Minorities under Communist Regimes", *Balkan Studies*, 2 (1961), 29, pp. 25–26; Hans Hartl, "Die Nationalitäten-Politik Des Kreml in Rumänien", *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, XXIV (July–August, 1953), 383; D. A. Tomasic, "The Rumanian Communist Leadership", pp. 482, 492–494; Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 204–215, 241–245, 316–321.
- ⁹ The importance of this Fifth Party Congress on the future development of the RWP cannot be over-emphasized. See: Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 40–46; *The Rumanian Workers' Party on the Eve*, pp. 3–4.
- ¹⁰ Even the Secretary-Generalship of the Party was held by the non-Rumanian Elek Koblos (alias Badulescu) between 1924–1928. Prior to that, the non-Rumanians C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Christian Rakovsky had played pre-eminent Party roles. For more on the role of Koblos, see: Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 25–28.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–28, 40–46; D. A. Tomasic, "The Rumanian Communist Leadership", *Slavic Review*, XX (October, 1961), pp. 479–480.
- ¹² Another similarity to be noted among the ethnic Romanian "workers" of the Party is their "religious" background – Eastern (Romanian) Orthodox. *Ibid.*, pp. 480–485. Though this factor is not decisive in a Communist setting, it should be mentioned because it points out that these leaders had similar childhood experiences and education.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 482, 492–494; *The Rumanian Workers' Party on the Eve*, p. 8; Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 204–215, 241–245, 316–321.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79, 118, 350–356; Fischer-Galáti, *Romania*, pp. 344–350.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–67; Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 78–79, 94–106.
- ¹⁶ "Rumanian Planner: Gheorghe Gaston-Marin", *New York Times*, June 2, 1964, p. 12; *The Rumanian Workers' Party on the Eve*, pp. 21–23.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–18, 23–31, 34–38; *An Analysis of the Elections at the Third Rumanian Party Congress* (Radio Free Europe, Munich, Germany, July, 1960), pp. 23–25; "Rumania's Strongman: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej", *New York Times*, January 20, 1964, p. 8.
- ¹⁸ Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 78–79.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 284–287.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Tomasic, "The Rumanian Communist Leadership", p. 482.
- ²³ Lipcsey, "A forradalom hatása...", p. 1.
- ²⁴ Sebők, *Kolozsvári perek*, p. 12.
- ²⁵ Lipcsey, "A forradalom hatása...", p. 1.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ²⁷ Lajos Csögör, "Előszó" in Rudolf Joó and Béla Barabás, "A Kolozsvári Magyar Egyetem 1945-ben", unpublished MS prepared for the Magyarságkutató Intézet, 1988, pp. 11–12.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*; Elemér Illyés, *National Minorities in Romania: Change in Transylvania* (Boulder and New York: East European Monographs, 1982), pp. 106–111.
- ²⁹ Rudolf Joó, "Egy sorsdöntő esztendő: 1945 a Kolozsvári Magyar Egyetem történetéből", *Hitel*, X, No. 1 (January 3, 1989), p. 24; Csögör, "Előszó", p. 8.
- ³⁰ Joó, "Egy sorsdöntő esztendő", pp. 23–24.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ³² *Ibid.*; Csögör, "Előszó", pp. 10–11.
- ³³ *Ibid.*; Joó, "Egy sorsdöntő esztendő", p. 24.
- ³⁴ György Lázár, "Memorandum", in *Witnesses to Cultural Genocide: First-Hand Reports on Rumania's Minority Policies Today* (New York: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1979), pp. 104–105.

- ³⁵ Robert R. King, *Minorities Under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension Among Balkan Communist States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 84.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Ferenc A. Vali, "Transylvania and the Hungarian Minority", *Journal of International Affairs*, No. 20 (1966), p. 280.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 282; István Révay, "Hungarian Minorities under Communist Rule", in *The Fight For Freedom: Facts About Hungary* (New York: Hungarian Committee, 1959), p. 298.
- ⁴⁰ Kálmán Aniszi, "A Bolyai Tudományegyetem utolsó esztendeje: Beszélgetés dr. Sebestyén Kálmánnal", *Hitel*, XII, No. 3 (March, 1999), p. 83; *A romániai magyar főiskolai oktatás: Múlt, jelen, jövő* (Cluj/Kolozsvár: Jelenlét Alkotó Társaság, 1990), p. 21.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
- ⁴² *Ibid.* p. 22.
- ⁴³ Aniszi, "A Bolyai Tudományegyetem...", p. 83.
- ⁴⁴ *A romániai magyar főiskolai oktatás*, pp. 22–23.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23–24; Aniszi, "A Bolyai Tudományegyetem utolsó esztendeje", pp. 86–87.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86; *A romániai magyar főiskolai oktatás*, p. 25.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26; Aniszi, "A Bolyai Tudományegyetem utolsó esztendeje", pp. 86–87; Péter Cseke and Lajos Kántor (eds.) *Szabédi napjai*, (Cluj/Kolozsvár: Komp-press, Korunk Baráti Társasága, 1998), pp. 127–136.
- ⁵² *A romániai magyar főiskolai oktatás*, pp. 26–27.
- ⁵³ For this "Romanianization" process see *Rumania's Violations of Helsinki Final Act Provisions Protecting the Rights of National, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities* (New York: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, 1980), pp. 20–31.
- ⁵⁴ Sebők, *Kolozsvári perek*, p. 20.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–22.

