

## **History of International Relations**

### **Romanian-Magyar Relations in the Period 1940-1944. Sections**

**Cristian Sandache<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** During the Second World War, Romania and Hungary were in the same political-military camp as allied states of Nazi Germany. The annexation of Northern Transylvania by Budapest as a result of the Vienna Diktat (August 30, 1940) intensified the tension between the two countries, both reaffirming throughout the war, that they have full historical and political rights over this region, denying the arguments presented in this sense by the other side. The persecutions and atrocities of the Hungarian authorities over the ethnic Romanians in the Transylvanian region ceded to Hungary were promptly reported to Germany and Italy by the diplomacy of Bucharest, which repeatedly tried to convince the Vienna decision that the act of 30 August 1940 had become obsolete.

**Keywords:** political-military camp; the Hungarian authorities; diplomacy of Bucharest

The events of the year 1940 were a massive collective trauma for Romania, in terms borrowed from the psychological language, it was possible to talk about self-esteem at extremely low quota of the Romanian people. Figures and statistics provided additional reasons for such a state of mind. After ceding the territories in that year, Romania had an area of 195,259 km<sup>2</sup>.

According to the April 6, 1941 census, the population of the country was of 13,535,757 inhabitants, of which 87,8% represented Romanians.

The percentage of national minorities decreased from 28.1% (1930) to 12.6% in 1941 and the most important minority existing in Romania in 1941 was the German one, which accounted for 4.1%.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of International Relations, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, Tel.: +40372361102, Corresponding author: cristiansandache@yahoo.com.

The situation of the lost territories was as follows: Bessarabia had an area of 44,442 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 3,190,000 inhabitants; Northern Bucovina - 5220 km<sup>2</sup> and 596,000 inhabitants; North Transylvania - 42,350 km<sup>2</sup> and 2,609,000 inhabitants; Southern Dobrogea - 7726 km<sup>2</sup> and 426,000 inhabitants.

Land losses have reduced Romania's agricultural area by 20.59%. North Transylvania's disposal equaled the loss of 4,261,044 hectares of land, of which arable land - 1,327,502 hectares; forests - 1,469,238 hectares; 1,243,699 - meadows and pastures.

With the transfer of North Transylvania, Romania lost 66% of its gold production, and 90% of its silver production.

After June 22, 1941, Romania's foreign policy introduced a new theme, declaring the legal ductility of the Vienna Dictate, an attitude that illustrated the increase of the Romanian state's prestige within the Axis, given that, according to the number of staff mobilized on the Soviet front, Romania ranks second after Germany.

The first step was to inform the Chancelleries of Stockholm, Vichy, Lisbon, Madrid, Berne, Sofia and Ankara, on the Hungarian state's violation of all the obligations that arise from Vienna's arbitration, against the Romanian population of the ceded territory, mass murders and violations of rights, the destruction of places of worship, expulsions and property violations.

On August 25, 1941, Mihai Antonescu stated in a press conference in front of some German journalists that “*Vienna's arbitration is over by Hungary's unilateral execution that has done everything to despise the stipulations of this arbitration.*”

At the same time, a true Romanian-Hungarian media war unfolded with increasing intensity. On June 10, 1941 to draft a paper (in Romanian and German) which synthesize everything run libelous against Romania, the Hungarian press and radio in the previous month. In June 1941, four copies of the summary were taken by Ion Antonescu during his visit to Germany, to be surrendered to Adolf Hitler and the leaders of the Third Reich. The most frequent appeals to the Romanians were related to their alleged capital defects: inculcation, thievery, dirt, laziness.

Constantly in his attitude to the problem of North Transylvania, Mihai Antonescu, declared (August 9, 1941):

*“The Romanian people will never abandon their rights to Transylvania and it would be an act of national treason if we believe that the rights of Transylvania can be compensated.”*

There is a great fear among ethnic Romanian Transylvanian of North, that Hungary could conduct an armed attack on Romania, somewhere towards the end of 1942, fears fueled also by violence with Hungarian mass-media attacking the Romanian state, and the Hungarian proposal according to which, after the re-conquest by Romania of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, it would have been opportune to relocate the entire Romanian population from Transylvania to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, thus realizing a sort of ethnic cleansing obviously in favor of Hungary.

The fascination of the political-military circles in Budapest for Hungary's takeover of the whole of Transylvania was a constant concern of that period.

The main arguments were those of a statistical nature, clearly deformed, such as the allegation that 50% of the inhabitants of North Transylvania were of Hungarian origin, which would have justified Budapest to aspire to the annexation of Transylvania in its entirety.

Hungarian historian Laszlo Konter wrote that during 1938-1941, the decisive support of Nazi Germany brought Hungary 80,000 km<sup>2</sup>, or almost half of the territory lost in the 1920 at Trianon. In 1941, within the borders of Hungarians in Hungary reached a rate of 79%, the rest being made up of a million of Romanian, 700,000 Germans, 500,000 Ruthenian.

In early October 1919, Miklos Horthy conceived a strategic memorandum in which he argued that for the rebuilding of St. Stephen's Hungary it was absolutely necessary to destroy Romania, considered the main enemy of Hungary, because the Hungarian state has the highest territorial claims on it and because it is the strongest of the neighboring states. Until the right time has come for an attack, peaceful relations with Romania will have to be maintained, but any opportunity should be used to isolate it diplomatically, and Transylvania must continue to be a highly active Hungarian irredentism.

It was absolutely necessary for the ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania to instil the idea that they had no future in this region if it remained in the Romanian state. The Hungarian government treated all ethnic Hungarians in useful positions as potential agents. In 1940, Budapest had detailed information on 1,600 Romanian officers

and civilian employees married to ethnic Hungarians and over 3,000 ethnic Romanians in some degree related to Hungarian families as well as on the identity of the history of all ethnic Hungarians employed in railway stations, warehouses and workshops in Transylvania and all the electrical and water purification plants in the region. The intercepted orders requiring such information stated that they were necessary for the sabotage operations to be carried out in the case of a Romanian-Hungarian conflict. Budapest excelled in the field of propaganda, a capacity originally developed to support the Hungarian independence movement under the Habsburg rule.

Hungarian espionage acted actively and persuasively in Transylvania, from 1938 to 1939, marking an intensification of it. In 1939, the Secret Intelligence Service of Romania discovered groups operating in Carei, Cehul Silvaniei, Cluj, Hunedoara, Marghita, Miercurea-Ciuc, Odorhei, Satu Mare, Targu Mures, Zalau.

In the first part of 1940, the German ambassador to Budapest noticed with surprise that his Soviet counterpart accredited in the Hungarian capital, openly encouraged the Hungarian authorities to military attack in Romania. In response, Budapest welcomed the annexation by the USSR of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.

The USSR had at one point declared (through Viaceslav Molotov) that it would support Hungary at any international conference where the issue of territorial claims of Budapest would be raised. The growing confidence of the Budapest-Hungarian political and military circles in Hungary's ability to finally resolve the disputes with Romania by attacking this country in 1940 was considered a utopia by Germany, the Berlin authorities urging Budapest not to risk such an adventure.

After August 30, 1940, the Hungarian state expelled between 40,000 and 60,000 ethnic Romanians, dispatching another 70,000 to the Soviet front, enrolled in forced labor companies.

Romania did not respond with such treatment to the ethnic Hungarians remaining in southern Transylvania. Romania's attitude was recorded during two German-Italian investigations (the first under the joint command of Altenburg and Count Roggeri in 1940, and second under the command of Henke and Roggeri in 1943) on the deviations and atrocities committed in Transylvania.

The Romanian education system was nearly annihilated in North Ardeal, after 30 August 1940. The 1,200,000 ethnic Romanians were to benefit from only 692 primary schools and 10 secondary schools (including one high school) compared to

1844 primary schools and 106 gymnasiums for almost one million ethnic Hungarians.

The Romanian state knew of the process of ethnic cleansing initiated by the Hungarian government in the North Transylvanian region, as well as the Memorandum handed over by Mihai Antonescu to General Headquarters of Hitler on September 22, 1942.

During 1943, there were organized events of the Hungarians from the North Transylvanian region, during which they requested the annexation of all Transylvania to Hungary.

An important religious figure of the Hungarian life in Romania - Bishop Marton Aron, supported in a masked way the Hungarian irredentism, especially during the years 1941-1942, benefiting from his prestige as an important man of the church, unanimously respected both by the ethnic Hungarians, but also by many Romanian ethnics.

Between 1940 and 1942, the Bucharest authorities carried out intense diplomatic actions alongside the Axis Powers in order to halt Hungary's abuses in North Transylvania.

The first German-Italian commission of inquiry in Transylvania on October 17, 1940, was to travel 3,500 kilometers in 11 days and to hear over 500 people. The itinerary followed was Brasov-Sibiu-Turda-Cluj-Ip-Trăznea- Mureşenii de Câmpie-Huedin-Oradea-Arad-Timişoara. The commission report was finalized on October 31, 1940, the conclusions pointing out that the Hungarian side bears a greater responsibility than the Romanian one in committing incriminating facts.

Bucharest continued to store new evidence of Hungarian atrocities with the aim of presenting them as evidence at the next peace conference and exerting a kind of psychological-persuasive pressure, in addition to the powers of the Axis.

Mihai Antonescu presented to Berlin (November 26, 1941) a new Memorandum containing all known cases of anti-Romanian acts orchestrated by Hungary in the North of Transylvania.

The second commission of inquiry in Transylvania (July 1942 - February 1943) presented on February 8, 1943, a report also unfavorable to the Hungarian side, just as the last one.

On the occasion of his audience with Adolf Hitler (27 November 1941), Mihai Antonescu thus presented to the Führer of Germany, the situation in North Transylvania:

*“The treatment of the Romanians in Northern Transylvania is so wild, they have destroyed churches and acts of repeated violence and oppression, that even if the Romanian Government understands not to put the issue on a substantive solution in the relations with Hungary immediately, for that Mr von Ribbentrop showed me that this would be impossible, under the current circumstances, the Romanian Government understands in any case to do its duty, requiring the Reich Government to intervene in Budapest for such situations to cease. Thus, the Romanian public opinion would be exasperated, and the Government of Marshal Antonescu would no longer be able to control the consequences of the Hungarian provocations.”*

It was a fact that the North Transylvanian problem was one of the themes of the propaganda of the Antonescu regime, there being a real symbiosis between Ion Antonescu and Mihai Antonescu - both Romanian leaders being extremely sensitive to the drama of this part of the country, Horthy Hungary.

On September 12, 1941, Mihai Antonescu (in a memo to Manfred von Killinger) stated that for Romania, Transylvania *“is not a land, a territory, much less a property, for Transylvania is the citadelle where we lived and have suffered 2000 years.”* It was therefore natural for the act of August 30, 1940 to be severely criticized by the leader of the Romanian State, who was trying to specify that Romania would never be able to reconcile with the consequences of the Vienna Dictate:

*“The Vienna Dictum is a dagger in the Romanian body.”*

On May 31, 1942, Mihai Antonescu had held a conference in Sibiu entitled *“Our Transylvania”* opportunity to make a true portrait of this Romanian province, a portrait from which it would prevail all the love and despair, the hope and the desire for vengeance specific to a humiliated people:

*“Transylvania is all of us, it is our history, it is our own soul. We love Transylvania (...). We do not participate in history by words, but by deeds, by sacrifice, by blood. That's why our mission, our destiny in this Romanian time, lies in the hand of the Romanian soldier.”*

The fact that between 1938 and 1941, Horthyist Hungary recovered about 40% of Trianon's lost territories, placed Horthy in the myth, its cognomen of "land recuperation", being, in this sense, perfectly explicable. The cinematographic snapshots of the time surprised the maximum popular enthusiasm of the Hungarian collectivity, considering that they witnessed a real miracle, given that, without firing a gun, the Hungarian armies penetrated into the former territories once owned by Hungary, only with the formalities of dealing with them. At the entrance to Cluj (the former capital of Transylvania), the snapshots of the year 1940 captured the state of the Transylvanian Hungarians, convinced that the divine miracles existed and that Divinity finally turned its bright side towards the injured Hungarian nation that had been bleeding for so long during the trianonic dictate...

The central square of Cluj, with the imposing Matus Corvin's equestrian statue (flanked by the massive silhouettes of some of the gunmen who were loyal), the huge Hungarian flags that swept the old buildings and the sea of flowers that the crowd flung to the columns of soldiers scrolled on the backdrop of specific military marches - all created an atmosphere of a magical, extreme, hard-to-describe patriotism. There are survivors today, witnesses of those days considered astral in the history of Hungary. Everyone remembers with a complete emotion, the indescribable happiness they lived, a combined happiness, but with some sort of anxiety, in the sense that they thought that such contextual luck could not, however, last to infinity without the people Hungarians to be asked for an effort, a sacrifice, a price ... It was the joy of a retrieval among the compatriots, the belief that by God's will, Hungary would once again become the powerful state of the past, a true hegemony of the East-Central European region.

The four years in which Transylvania was an integral part of Hungary coincided with the extraordinary administrative-propagandist efforts of the Hungarian authorities, in that it attempted a total remake of the province and its integration into the national body, without thus erasing the historical identity. For many Hungarians living in Hungary, Transylvania was to become the main tourist region of Hungary, a mythical land, a blessed place that secured the survival of the Hungarian state after the Mohacs disaster, even in the framework of autonomy and independence.

As long as the majority of ethnic Orthodox Romanians continued to be maintained in the status of a tolerant population, there was all the prerequisites for which Transylvania was to be considered a kind of prolongation of historic Hungary, as

long as the Hungarian nobility elite continued to give Transylvanian principles, an alternative to the Magyar, in a tragic historical context. This was the perception of the Hungarian elite, as it was the way of looking at Transylvania (Ardeal) of the great majority of Hungarians. The fact that it was a territory conquered by weapons was sufficient for it to be considered simply "Hungarian land", many of the representatives of Hungarian historiography still considering that the invocation of historical law is not obsolete. Parallelisms have also been made of the phenomenon of conquering England by the Normans, and the defeated Saxons have to accept the domination of a nation that has proved superior in military terms, but not least - possessing a higher civilization. If we step on the slippery field of speculation, we could "prove" almost anything...

In the cinematographic pictures of that time, the regent Miklos Horthy receives the offerings of the crowd of his compatriots and greets them with undisguised satisfaction, and his presence at the beginning of the manifestations, riding on a beautiful white horse - was an illustration of one of the representations dear to the Hungarian collective soul - the image of the king or the leader overlaid with the image of the white horse, one of the clichés of the Hungarian mythology.

The strangely similar to an eagle (the Tour) that led the Hungarian tribes to Pannonia, along with the appearance of the white horse, was part of the imaginative-spiritual patrimony of the Magyars. The propaganda of the time (and from this point of view it can be said that the Hungarians were masters in the design of an effective propagandistic aesthetics) frequently and efficiently appealed to the symbolism of national history without which the chances of mobilizing and raising public awareness were null.

Romanians seem absent from this aulico-bombastic scenography, as if it were an uninhabited territory, but it was only a truly psychological effect. It is no coincidence that this invasion of Transylvania followed a series of cruelty and self-sacrifices that forever cast a black spot on the history of the Hungarian people.

The right to free manifestation of the conqueror was a medieval fame (and even before the Middle Ages), only in the case of 1940, Transylvania was not conquered simply by the Romanian troops, Germany being the power that gave Hungary this opportunity.



And even under these conditions, public opinion in Hungary still shows dissatisfaction, because it would have wanted Hungary to re-engage all of Transylvania, which (for many reasons) Germany could not accept in any way.

In fact, throughout the war, Hitler used the issue of Transylvania to maintain a certain degree of ambiguity and tension between Romania and Hungary, thus succeeding in securing a certain political-military control of Germany over the two allied countries within the Axis.