
BOOK REVIEW

“THE SZEKLER PROBLEM” – G. BADEA LĂTUCEANU. BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

*This material is a review of the book entitled *The Szekler Problem*, written by G. Badea Lătuceanu. The book deals with the question of the origin of the Szeklers and demonstrates that they are not Hungarians. The fact that today they speak Hungarian (with noticeable peculiarities) and have Hungarian names (in fact Hungarianized) is the result of an intense and long process of assimilation. At present, the Hungarian state is demanding autonomy for a so-called “Szeklerland” in which, according to the 2022 census, not a single person has declared themselves to be a Szekler. This book also presents in a synthetic and argued manner how the presence of Romanians in the south-east of Transylvania has been diminished over time by aggressive Hungarianization policies.*

Keywords: Szeklers, Romanians, Hungarians, assimilation, autonomy, and Transylvania.

SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK

The book entitled *The Szekler Problem*, written under the pseudonym G. Badea Lătuceanu, was published in 2010 by Proema. The introduction to the readers was signed by the President of the Romanian Academy – Academician Ioan Aurel Pop. He underlined the concise and documented way this work was written and underlined the need to approach this issue. The concluding speech belongs to the sociologist and man of culture Ioan Lăcătușu. He highlighted the value of the work in that it demonstrates once again that Transylvania has always been inhabited by Romanians, even in the so-called “Szeklerland”. According to him, this work also speaks convincingly about the inconsistency and harmfulness of projects that create an ethnic enclave in the Covasna-Harghita area, but also because such projects are not in the best interest of the Romanians or the Hungarians in this area⁸⁹.

In about 100 pages the author manages to present eloquently a series of counterarguments to the obsessive demands of some Hungarian political leaders for territorial autonomy on ethnic criteria of the so-called “Szeklerland”. Badea

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⁸⁹ Ioan Lăcătușu in the postface of the book G. Badea Lătuceanu, *Problema secuiască [The Szekler Problem]*, Baia Mare, Proema Publishing, 2010, p. 102.

Lătuceanu demonstrated that this area was originally populated by Romanians, and that later, somewhere between the 12th and 13th centuries, the Szeklers came to this area. However, both Romanians and Szeklers were abandoned facing with aggressive Hungarianization policies, resulting today in an artificial “ethnic mass”. Despite efforts to increase their own population, the area under study has, according to the census, a significant percentage of non-Hungarians (Romanians and Roma, approx. 40%⁹⁰). For this reason, autonomy based on ethnic criteria is completely unfounded and, above all, unconstitutional.

The work is a veritable source of documentation, bringing together in its pages, to the credit of the author and the joy of those interested, an impressive base of translated documents, especially from Hungarian. Although it is based on a huge amount of documentary work, the book has not had the notoriety that the subject deserves. To our knowledge, it has not been translated into any international language. Moreover, the decision-makers, for whom this work would have been a veritable collection of arguments, have not taken note of it.

Regarding the current state of the problem, it must be said that more than 13 years after the issue was discussed, the situation has aggravated. The demand of Hungarian political leaders for ethnic autonomy has intensified. At the end of 2022, the so-called “Szekler National Council” submitted to the Romanian Prime Minister a letter of over 100 pages in which it obsessively repeated the granting of ethnic autonomy to the so-called “Szeklerland”⁹¹. We note that this request is launched in the context in which, according to the last census, conducted last year by the National Institute of Statistics, there are no longer any Szeklers in Romania⁹². However, we would also point out that these repeated requests do not receive any significant response from Romanian state representatives.

CONTEXT OF THE BOOK'S PUBLICATION

The book is a response to the increasing victimization of Hungarian political leaders, both nationally and internationally. The last few years have been marked by

⁹⁰ National Institute of Statistics, „Recensământul populației și locuințelor – structura etnică și profesională” [“Census of Population and Housing – ethnic and occupational structure”], 2002, apud *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁹¹ Mădălina Dinu, „Consiliul Național al Secuilor a cerut autonomie teritorială printr-o scrisoare de 100 de pagini trimisă lui Nicolae Ciucă” [“The National Council of Szeklers asked for territorial autonomy through a 100-page letter sent to Nicolae Ciucă”], December 26, 2022, in *Evenimentul Zilei*, Available at: <https://evz.ro/consiliul-national-al-secuilor-au-cerut-autonomie-teritoriala-la-printr-o-scrisoare-de-100-de-pagini-trimisa-lui-nicolae-ciuca.html>, Accessed on March 8, 2023.

⁹² Cezar Amariei, „Deși nu mai există oficial secuii cer Guvernului autonomia Ținutului Secuiesc” [“Although the Szeklers no longer officially exist, they ask the Government for autonomy for Szeklerland”], March 10, 2023, in *Puterea*, Available at: <https://www.puterea.ro/desi-nu-mai-exista-oficial-secuiei-cer-guvernului-autonomia-tinutului-secuiesc/>, Accessed on March 12, 2023.

all kinds of accusations against Romania, such as that the rights of minorities are not respected, even though our country is an example of good practice in this regard, as noted by the relevant institutions.

The paper warns that we are witnessing a flagrant manipulation of historical reality. Not only the Hungarians have no grounds for victimization, but the real victims, including many Romanians, are condemned to oblivion. Here is what the President of the Romanian Academy, Academician Ioan Aurel Pop, says on the subject:

“All parties should be guaranteed access to truth and justice. And while recently we have heard more and more, including in high European forums, about «victims» of a certain kind, it is imperative that we take the necessary time perspective and see exactly who the victims really were, when and why. And there have been plenty of victims, too many among Romanians! (...) Romania is now part of the European Union and must respect European standards on national minorities. And the highest European authorities say that it is doing so. Let’s trust these authorities, who have a comparative overview and not those who are interested in provoking storms”⁹³.

Beyond this, because of the involvement of Hungarian politicians, confusion has been created regarding the origin of the Szekler ethnic groups, and it is now believed that they are Hungarian only because they speak Hungarian (in fact a Hungarian language with obvious dialectal peculiarities) and because they have Hungarian (Hungarianized) names. Therefore, the inhabitants of “Szeklerland” are Hungarians and the demand for autonomy is justified. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to document the origin of the Szeklers, calling on a few experts in the field, both at the national and international level.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD OF WORK

An objective of the work under review is to serve as a documentary basis on the destiny of the Romanians and Szeklers to show the good coexistence that existed between the two ethnic groups until the Hungarian state-initiated assimilation policies:

“Therefore, the initiative to put together, in a small space, some essential historical data about the destiny of the Szeklers and Romanians is welcome and can be very useful for those who want to know. Readers will thus be in a position to know how the Szeklers found the Romanians in their old places in the ‘border mountains’ when they

⁹³ „Se cuvine ca toate părțile implicate să aibă garantat accesul la adevăr și la dreptate. Iar dacă, în anii din urmă, am auzit mai mult, inclusiv la înalte foruri europene, despre «victime» de un anumit fel, trebuie cu necesitate să ne luăm perspectiva de timp necesară și să vedem exact care au fost cu adevărat victimele, când și de ce. Iar victime au fost destule, prea multe și printre români! (...) Romania este acum parte componentă a Uniunii Europene și trebuie să respecte standardele europene în materie de minorități naționale. Iar cele mai înalte autorități europene spun că o face cu prisosință. Să ne încredem în aceste autorități, care au viziunea comparativă de ansamblu și nu în aceia care au interes să stârneasă furtuni!”, in Ioan Aurel Pop in the preface of G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

arrived in the 11th–13th centuries, how they lived ‘mixed’ with the Romanians and how they learned ‘letters’ from the Romanians (as the chronicler Simon of Keza tells us, around 1283), they will learn about the assimilation of the Romanians by name, by religion, by the systematic policy of Hungarianization, etc.”⁹⁴.

The book also shows readers that the presence of Romanians in southeastern Transylvania has been systematically reduced over the years and highlights the methods by which they were assimilated. The Romanians and the Szeklers cohabited peacefully (both in the Romanian Principalities and later in Modern Romania), traded with each other, worked, and earned money in both the south and east of the Carpathians. In short, the destinies of the Romanians and Szeklers were linked even though there were many over the years who wished to separate them⁹⁵. The article shows us that although we can talk about an assimilation of the Romanians in “Szeklerland” by the Szeklers, this process was peaceful, unlike the Hungarianization which was often violent.

To achieve the objectives listed above, the author has used several scientific works, mostly of Hungarian origin. Thus, by using scientific works, it will be demonstrated that what we find under the name hostile to Romania’s interests, the “Szekler Bloc”, is rather an abusive name⁹⁶, because it does not consider either the Szeklers or the Romanians of this area who were assimilated.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SZEKLEERS

Why are the Szeklers different from the Hungarians?

Two of the common arguments in Hungarian discourse regarding the origin of the Szeklers are that they are Hungarians because they speak Hungarian and have Hungarian names (as we have already said – Hungarianized). The fact that they speak Hungarian does not mean that they belong to the Hungarian ethnic group. These issues have arisen because of Hungarianization policies and are the most obvious evidence of these assimilation practices. Numerous testimonies demonstrate to this:

“Although today the Szeklers speak Hungarian (a Hungarian language with obvious dialectal peculiarities), they do not belong to the Hungarian ethnic group. This is also the almost unanimous observation of the old Hungarian chroniclers, as well as of all

⁹⁴ „De aceea, inițiativa de a pune la un loc, pe un spațiu restrâns, câteva date istorice esențiale despre destinul secuilor și al românilor este binevenită și poate să fie foarte utilă pentru cei dornici să știe. Cititorii vor fi în postura de a ști astfel cum i-au găsit secuii, la venirea lor în secolele XI–XIII, pe români în locurile lor vechi, din «munții de margine», cum au trăit «amestecați» cu românii și cum au învățat de la români «literele» (cum ne spune, pe la 1283, cronicarul Simon de Keza), vor afla despre secuizarea românilor prin nume, prin religie, prin politica sistematică de maghiarizare etc.”, in *Ibidem*, pp. 8–9.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁹⁶ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Western travellers through these parts of Transylvania since the beginning of the 16th century”⁹⁷.

“Absolutely all those who speak, in chronicles or in correspondence, about Transylvania and its inhabitants, (ex. P. Ransanus, Cosimo Capponi, Alfonso Visconti, Pigafetta, P. Pelardi, Gian Lorenzo d’Anania, G. Poter, G. A. Magini, or the sasul G. Reicherstorfer, as well as the humanists Sebastian Münster and Nicolae Olahus etc. etc.) always make a clear distinction between Hungarians and Szeklers”⁹⁸.

“Moreover in chap. 50 of the ‘Gesta Hungarorum’ (12th–13th century) it says: ‘(...) an army [of Arpad] led by Usubu meets [on the tributary of the Tisa, Couroug] the Szeklers who belonged to Attila’s people and who, hearing of his fame, come forward with gifts and offer their sons as hostages’. It is obvious that, if they belonged to the same ethnic group, the Szeklers would not have had to offer their own children to the Hungarians as hostages, as strangers, to whom they had to win their trust and prove their loyalty”⁹⁹.

In fact, on September 16, 1437, during the Revolt of Bobâlna, the “Brotherly Agreement” between the privileged nations of Transylvania (Unio Trium Nationum) was signed in Căpâlna. According to it, there were three privileged nations in Transylvania (the Szeklers being one of them), while the Romanians were considered a “tolerated nation”¹⁰⁰. It is easy to understand that if the ethnic Hungarians’ claims were true, the documents would have recorded this reality. However, the testimonies of the time show a clear separation between Hungarians and Szeklers.

What are their origins?

The origins of the Szeklers are unclear. They say they are “remnants of the old Scythians”¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ „Deși astăzi secuii vorbesc ungrește (de fapt o limbă maghiară cu evidente particularități dialectale), ei nu aparțin etniei maghiare. Aceasta este și constatarea aproape unanimă a vechilor cronicari maghiari, precum și a tuturor călătorilor occidentali prin aceste părți ale Ardealului, încă de la începutul secolului XVI”, in *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁹⁸ „Absolut toți cei ce vorbesc, în relatări sau în corespondență, despre Transilvania și locuitorii ei, (ex. P. Ransanus, Cosimo Capponi, Alfonso Visconti, Pigafetta, P. Pelardi, Gian Lorenzo d’Anania, G. Poter, G. A. Magini, sau sasul G. Reicherstorfer, ca și umaniștii Sebastian Münster și Nicolae Olahus etc. etc.) fac mereu o netă deosebire între unguri și secui”, in *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹⁹ „De altfel în cap. 50 din «Gesta Hungarorum» (sec. XII–XIII) se spune: «(...) o armată [a lui Arpad] condusă de Usubu întâlnește [pe afluentul Tisei, Couroug] pe SECUI ce făceau parte din popoarele lui Attila și care, auzind de faima lui, îi ies înaintea cu daruri și-și oferă fiii ca ostateci». Este evident că, dacă ar fi aparținut aceleiași etniei, secuii n-ar fi trebuit să ofere unguilor proprii copii ca ostateci, ca unor străini necunoscuți, cărora urma să le trezească încredere și să le dovedească fidelitate”, in Anonimus, *Gesta Hungarorum [The actions of the Hungarians]*, cap. 50, sec. XII–XIII, apud *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰ Cosmin Țintă, „16 septembrie: 585 de ani de la Unio Trium Nationum, înțelegerea prin care românii erau complet eliminați din viața social-politică a Transilvaniei” [“16 September: 585 years since the Unio Trium Nationum, the agreement by which the Romanians were completely eliminated from the social-political life of Transylvania”], September 16, 2022, in *Active News*, Available at: <https://www.activenews.ro/cultura/16-septembrie-585-de-ani-de-la-Unio-Trium-Nationum-intelegerea-prin-care-romanii-erau-complet-eliminati-din-viata-social-politica-a-Transilvaniei-136507>, Accessed on March 12, 2023.

¹⁰¹ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

“That the Sects are of the Hunnic lineage no one doubts (...) as some who still retain Scythian primitiveness, they differ from the Hungarians in almost all their customs, laws, and way of life, except religion; and they are not even alike in language, when they speak like their ancestors”¹⁰².

However, the history of Transylvania has always made a distinction between the nations that populated it, noting that the Szeklers are not Hungarians. Even the Hungarians recognized this at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919:

“(...) according to the Final Memorandum of the Hungarian Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Hungarians declared that ‘the Szeklers are of Avar origin, a population, which in the Middle Ages concluded a Pact with the Hungarians in Transylvania, each of these nations having full power over the territory they occupied – Unio Trium Nationum’”¹⁰³.

Differences between Hungarians and Szeklers vs. similarities between Romanians and Szeklers

When they came to the intra-Carpathian circle in the 11th–13th centuries, the Szeklers found the Romanians here, with whom they cohabited peacefully for a long time. Political, social, economic, and other forms of cooperation led to similarities preserved over time.

a) Linguistic

The Szeklers cannot be considered Hungarians simply because they speak Hungarian today:

“(...) to reduce or limit the specificity and character of an ethnic group (exclusively) to language – which seems to have satisfied the Hungarians in their politics in the past – is a generalization which, today is far from being a scientific position”¹⁰⁴.

“The ethnicity, but especially the origin of the ethnic Hungarians, is also manifested in other areas of material culture in which they are clearly different from the ethnic Hungarians”¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰² „Că secuii sunt de neam hunic nu se îndoiește nimeni (...) ca unii care mai păstrează până acum primitivitatea scitică, se deosebesc de unguri aproape în toate obiceiurile, legile și felul lor de a trăi, afară de religie; și nu se aseamănă nici chiar ca limbă, când vorbesc după chipul strămoșilor”, in Anton Verancsici, in *De situ Transilvaniae (...)* reprinted in Budapest in 1944, and in *Monumenta Hungariae Historica, Scriptores*, II, pp. 120–151, apud *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁰³ „(...) potrivit Memorandum-ului final al Delegației maghiare la Conferința de Pace de la Paris din 1919, ungurii au declarat că «secuii sunt de origine avară, o populație care în Evul Mediu a încheiat un Pact cu ungurii și sașii în Transilvania, fiecare din aceste națiuni având putere deplină asupra teritoriului pe care îl ocupau – Unio Trium Nationum»”, in Ioan Ranca, *Românii din Secuime în antroponimele din conscripții [Romanians from Szeklerland in the anthroponyms of conscriptions]*, Vol. II. The Ciuc, Giurgeu and Cașin Seats, Tg. Mureș, 1997, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ „(...) a reduce sau a limita specificul și caracterul unei etnii (în mod exclusiv) la limbă – ceea ce pare a-i fi mulțumit încă din trecut pe maghiari în politica lor – constituie o generalizare care astăzi e departe de a mai reprezenta o poziție științifică”, in G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁵ „Etnia, dar mai ales originea secuilor se manifestă și în alte domenii ale culturii materiale prin care se deosebesc în mod evident de etnia maghiară”, in *Ibidem*, p. 16.

The fact that today all the Szeklers, as well as almost all the Romanians in this region, speak Hungarian and have Hungarian names (more precisely Hungarianized), has served as a pretext for the Hungarian elite to claim, erroneously, that they are Hungarian. In this sense, the aim of the rulers was to “protect” its cultural specificity from “dangerous foreign (Romanian) influences”, although it is known that the official language until the First World War, and then between 1940 and 1944, was Hungarian¹⁰⁶.

b) Architectural

Another proof that the Szeklers are not Hungarians are the architectural details of the houses. Moreover, these details show the common identity background of the Szeklers and Romanians:

“Let’s take for example, the elements related to the house of the Szekler. The gate is identical to that one in Maramureş or Oltenia; in this form, it is inexistent among Hungarians”¹⁰⁷.

“The roof of the Szekler’s house has four sides (slopes), like the Romanians, and not two, like the Hungarians”¹⁰⁸.

“The tiled floor of the Szekler house is identical to that of the Romanians, the Szeklers calling it *csardak*, like the Romanians, and not *tornac*, like the Hungarians”¹⁰⁹.

c) Musical

“Old Szekler music is characterized by the pentatonic scale, which is extremely common in Romanians, but is missing in Hungarians”¹¹⁰.

“The Hungarian scientist Seprody, studying the collection of songs known as the ‘Codex Caioni’, observes: ‘The special flavour of all Romanian melodies, with which, the Szekler music is so strongly impregnated’, and the researcher Fabo states: ‘In the development of the Kurutz traditional song, the Romanian participation is considerable (...), that is why it appears to the Hungarian ear as Romanian’. It is obvious, therefore, that the ‘secuized’ Romanians continued to use the pentatonic scale which the Szeklers then took over from the Romanians”¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰⁷ „Să luăm ca exemplu elementele legate de **casa secuului**. Poarta este identică la ei cu cea caracteristică Maramureşului sau Olteniei; în această formă ea este inexistentă la maghiari”, in Coriolan Petranu, *Etudes d’histoire de Part Transylvain [Transylvanian Part History Studies]*, Sibiu, 1944, p. 252, apud *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ „Acoperişul casei secuului este în patru ape (pante), ca la români, și nu în două, ca la unguri și sași”, in G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ „Cerdacul casei secuiești este identic cu cel al românilor, secuii numindu-l *csardak*, ca și români, și nu *tornac*, ca ungurii”, in *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ „**Muzica secuiască** veche e caracterizată prin gama pentatonică, extrem de frecventă și la români, ea lipsind la unguri, unde nu e caracteristică”, in *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹¹¹ „Savantul maghiar Seprody, studiind colecția de cântece, cunoscută sub numele de «Codex Caioni» constată: «Savoarea specială pe care o au toate melodiile românești de care este impregnată atât de puternic muzica secuiască», iar cercetătorul Fabo afirmă: «în dezvoltarea cântecului popular Kurutz, participarea românească e considerabilă (...), de aceea el apare urechii maghiare ca fiind românesc». Este evident, prin urmare, că românii «secuizați» au continuat să folosească gama pentatonică pe care secuii au luat-o apoi de la români”, in *Ibidem*.

d) Decorative

“Decorative elements. On carpets, embroidery, crests in wood, as well as on Easter eggs – frequently used by the Szeklers – geometric shapes appear, as in the Romanians and not floral, as in the Hungarians”¹¹².

e) Denominational: place names

“Slavo-Romanian toponyms are also frequent in this region”¹¹³.

f) Anatomical and biological

“In an age in which DNA is being studied so intensively, the cephalic index cannot be neglected, nor can the biological index, which brings the Szeklers closer to the Romanians than to the Hungarian ‘pusta’ population”¹¹⁴.

“All these characteristic elements of material and spiritual culture, present in the life of the Szekler – disregarded by the Hungarian side – when it invokes territorial autonomy, in addition to the language, the customs of the inhabitants of the Szeklerland – prove the existence of a common background with that of the native Romanians, unlike the language spoken today which, imposed by the administration over centuries, has ended up replacing the old language spoken by it, and about which both A. Verancsici and N. Olahus, as well as P. Ransanus, mention”¹¹⁵.

g) Folklore

The folklore shows us best how similar the Szeklers are to the Romanians because this segment was not subject to the Hungarian administration’s policy of Hungarianization. The dramatic poem, called “Vicleim”, about the birth of the Saviour, sung in the countryside on Christmas Eve, has a variant preserved in the Szekler tradition, which serves as a proof of the above¹¹⁶.

Therefore, when we talk about Romanians and Szeklers, we notice that there is a common Romanian background in all aspects of life, not just an influence. This explains why: 1. in the battles against the royal troops or those of the prince of Transylvania, the Szeklers fought alongside the Romanian voivods (alongside Michael the Brave, for example) and 2. the fact that in the 19th century, the Szeklers moved to Romania by the tens of thousands with passports¹¹⁷.

¹¹² „Elementele decorative. Pe covoare, broderii, creștături în lemn, ca și pe ouăle încondeiate de Paști – folosite frecvent de secui – apar forme geometrice, ca la români și nu florale, ca la unguri”, in *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ „De asemenea **toponimele** slavo-române sunt frecvente în această regiune”, in *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹¹⁴ „Într-o epocă în care se studiază atât de intens ADN-ul, nu poate fi neglijat nici **indicele cefalic, ca și cel biologic**, care îi apropie pe secui de români mai mult decât de populația din «pusta» maghiară”, in P. Ramneanțu, *Originea etnică a Secuilor din Transilvania*, in *Transylvania Journal [Ethnic Origins of the Transylvanian Szeklers]*, pp. 45–59, *apud Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ „Toate aceste elemente caracteristice culturii materiale și spirituale, prezente în viața secuului – nesocotite de partea maghiară – atunci când invocă autonomie teritorială *pentru a ocroti*, pe lângă limbă, *obiceiurile locuitorilor din Secuime* – dovedesc existența unui fond comun cu cel al autohtonului român, spre deosebire de limba vorbită azi care, impusă de administrație pe parcurs de secole, a sfârșit prin a înlocui vechea limbă vorbită de acesta, și despre care amintește atât A. Verancsici, cât și N. Olahus, precum și P. Ransanus”, in G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

¹¹⁷ Adrian Hamzea, *Congresul Secuiesc [The Szekler Congress]*, Milano, Nagrad Publishing, *apud Ibidem*, p. 67.

THE PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION OF THE SZEKLETS AND ROMANIANS

The elites as a destabilizing factor

From a statistical viewpoint, we can talk about an “ethnic epuration” in the case of Romanians and in case of Szeklers as well. The negative influence on inter-ethnic coexistence, however, comes from the Hungarian elite, whose actions continue along the same lines as in 1867: increasing the number of Hungarians at all costs:

“The common people, called Szeklers from outside, in the south-east of Transylvania, follow their traditional life, learn in schools with the Hungarian teaching language, go to their Roman Catholic or Calvinist churches, are led by Szekler (Hungarian) mayors and councilors, elected by them, speak their language freely, read the press in this language, etc. In the last two decades, the Romanians there have been getting fewer and fewer, and the remaining ones have endured without complaining. They have endured their overwhelming, the reduction in the number of Romanian churches and schools, discrimination in employment, hateful looks, direct or indirect accusations, and insults. But what did careful observers find? That life is generally peaceful and unhindered when it comes to ordinary people, that the rights of Hungarian speakers exist and are respected, that the Hungarian-Second identity is maintained and strengthened, and that forms of autonomy do exist, but that there are periodic ‘impulses’ from politicians that disturb the waters”¹¹⁸.

Purpose

Although there is a common background of identity between Romanians and Szeklers, the cause that made the “ethnic metamorphosis” of the Szeklers and Romanians possible is linked to the Hungarian state’s policy of assimilation. The Szeklers and some Romanians “became” Hungarians because of the Hungarian state’s desire to increase its numbers. At the time of the formation of the nation states because the Hungarians were a minority in the newly established Hungarian nation state, it was decided in 1867 to “correct” this “anomaly”¹¹⁹.

Relevant statistics

In 1894, the Hungarian statistics showed that there were 9.335.684 non-Hungarians and only 6.403.687 Hungarians in Hungary. This means that Hungarians

¹¹⁸ „Oamenii de rând, numiți dinafară secui, din sud-estul Transilvaniei își urmează viața tradițională, învață în școli cu limba de predare maghiară, merg la bisericile lor romano-catolice ori calvine, sunt conduși de primarii și consilierii secui (maghiari), aleși de ei, își vorbesc nestingheriți limba lor, citesc presa în această limbă etc. În ultimele două decenii românii de-acolo s-au tot împuținat, iar cei rămași au răbdat, fără să se plângă prea mult. Au răbdat copleșirea lor, reducerea numărului de biserici și de școli românești, discriminările la angajare, privirile piezișe, acuzele directe sau voalate, jignirile. Ce s-a constatat, însă, de către observatorii atenți? Că viața decurge, în general, lină și nestingherită, atunci când este vorba despre oamenii de rând, că drepturile celor care vorbesc limba maghiară există și sunt respectate, că identitatea ungaro-secuiască se menține și se fortifică și că formele autonomiei există de fapt, dar că intervin periodic «impulsuri» din partea unor politicieni care tulbură apele”, in Ioan Aurel Pop in the preface of the book G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.

¹¹⁹ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.

did not exceed 40% of the country's population. However, after the Hungarianization of names and the introduction of the compulsory Hungarian language, the situation changed radically in 1910. Of the 20.886.787 inhabitants of Greater Hungary, Hungarians grew to more than 50% in just 16 years, with a total of 10.818.000 people¹²⁰.

The results of assimilation policies were also visible in Romania: in Bistrița, for example, between 1880 and 1910, *i.e.*, in 30 years, the number of ethnic Hungarians increased by 390.2% and in Năsăud by 620.3%. The same phenomenon occurred in Deva, where, in the same period, the number of Hungarians increased by 293.8%, etc.¹²¹.

Instruments of Hungarianization

This “miraculous” increase in the number of ethnic Hungarians was based on several highly effective instruments, of which we list the following:

a) The Law on Equality of the Nationalities

In 1868, the Hungarian state adopted the “Law of Equality of Nationalities” to create an ethnically homogeneous Hungarian nation, in which we find an article stipulating that “In Hungary there is one single, indivisible nation, the Hungarian nation”¹²². The “egalitarian” name of the law is rather ironic in that it normalizes the supremacy of the Hungarian nation at all costs.

b) Central Society for the Hungarianization of the Names

To cement this “reality”, the “Central Society for the Hungarianization of the Names” was founded on March 26, 1881, with Simon Telkes, the author of the brochure “How to Hungarianize Patronymics” (surnames), as its president¹²³. Below are some significant passages from this brochure published in Budapest in 1898, under the signature of the president of the “Central Society for the Hungarianization of Names”.

“Like religious baptism, by which a person becomes a Christian and a member of the Christian community, the Hungarianization of the surname [the baptismal names had been Hungarianized centuries ago] takes on the character of a national baptism”¹²⁴.

“He who has a Hungarian name will never be able to deny his Hungarianness or underestimate his duties to his nation and homeland. At the risk of being contradicted by his name, he will never be able to say that he is not a Hungarian”¹²⁵.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹²¹ Z. Paclișan, *Der Ausrottungskampf Ungarns gegen seine nationalen Minderheiten [Hungary's extermination campaign against its national minorities]*, pp. 177–178, *apud Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹²² G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ „Asemănător botezului religios, prin care omul devine creștin și membru al comunității creștine, maghiarizarea numelui de familie [cele de botez fuseseră maghiarizate cu secole în urmă], îmbracă caracterul unui botez național, realizând admiterea definitivă a maghiarului ce poartă un nume străin, în societatea maghiară, printre adevărații fii ai națiunii”, in Simon Telkes, *Cum să maghiarizăm numele de familie [How to Hungarianize surnames]*, Budapest, 1898, in *Ibidem*, p. 60.

¹²⁵ „Cel ce poartă un nume unguresc nu va putea niciodată să renege calitatea sa de ungur, sau să subestimeze datoriile sale către națiunea și patria sa. Cu riscul de a fi dezmințit de numele său, el nu va putea spune niciodată că nu este ungur”, in *Ibidem*, p. 61.

“The Hungarianization of the name is an oath of patriotic loyalty (...)”¹²⁶.

c) EMKE Society

The third extremely effective means, both for the Hungarianization of names and for the introduction of the compulsory Hungarian language all over Hungary, was the EMKE society.

Its intentions are easily identified in the jubilee volume (25th anniversary) of 1892–1893. For the Hungarian state, the Szekler movement was the means of securing its presence in Transylvania, as the following statement shows:

“For the Szeklers, the state and law must take action (...) otherwise we will lose Transylvania”¹²⁷.

For the avoidance of doubt, we quote from the letter of 17 February 1891 addressed the Hungarian government by the secretary of this society, Sandor Ioszef:

“We must preserve and encourage the Szeklerland. Let us use it for consolidating cohesion, for the extension of the Hungarian islands and for the progress of assimilation, until the ethnic river of the Hungarian Pusta will unite with that of the Szeklers (...) After the application of these measures in favor of the Szeklers, who must be saved and helped, we can then think of gradually pushing the territory inhabited by the Szeklers toward the west, along the Plain and mountains of Bihor, until we achieve a united and compact ethnic mass (...)”¹²⁸.

The results of the “EMEKE” society were extremely satisfying:

“In three years, the EMKE Society has created 160 Hungarian schools in the Romanian regions, which is of great importance for Hungarianization”¹²⁹.

“We would like to mention here the problem of the Hungarianization of names. In this regard, we have prepared templates for applications for the Hungarianization of names, as well as procedural instructions”¹³⁰.

“Pharmacist Sandor Nagy from Tg. Mureș has Hungarianized 300 names’, and in the children’s asylum in the commune of Bârghiș, Târnava Mică County, it is noted:

¹²⁶ „Maghiarizarea numelui este un jurământ de fidelitate patriotică (...)” in *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ „Pentru Secuime trebuie ca statul și legea să treacă la fapte [...] altfel vom pierde Ardealul”, in ***, *Volumul jubiliar al societății Emke – 25 de ani [Jubilee volume of the Emke Society – 25 years, 1892–1893]*, p. 70, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹²⁸ „Trebuie să păstrăm și să încurajăm Secuimea. Să o folosim pentru întărirea coeziunii, pentru lărgirea insulelor ungurești și pentru progresul de asimilare, până când fluviul etnic al pusteii maghiare se va uni cu cel din secuime (...) După aplicarea acestor măsuri în favorul Secuimii, care trebuie salvată și ajutată, ne putem apoi gândi la împingerea treptată spre apus a teritoriului locuit de secui, de-a lungul Câmpiei și a munților Bihorului, până vom realiza o unitară și compactă masă etnică (...)”, in A. Gociman, *România și revizionismul maghiar [Romania and Hungarian revisionism]*, Bucharest, Universe Publishing, 1934, p. 208, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹²⁹ „Societatea EMKE a creat în trei ani în regiunile românești 160 de școli maghiare, ceea ce are mare importanță pentru maghiarizare”, in A. Gociman, *op. cit.*, p. 207, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹³⁰ „Amintim aici problema maghiarizării numelor. În acest sens am alcătuit modele pentru cererile de maghiarizare a numelor, precum și instrucțiuni de procedură”, in *Ibidem*, p. 209, apud *Ibidem*.

‘Compared to 800 Vlach children, there are only 200 Hungarians, the Vlach children speak more correct Hungarian than the Hungarians’¹³¹.

‘A permanent commission for Hungarianization has been set up in Cluj’¹³².

‘The Hungarian academic youth broke the windows of the local of the ‘Iulia’ society and the windows of the homes of the Romanian lawyers, Coroianu and Dr. Isacu. They then stopped in front of the house of Prof. Dr. Silași and demonstrated in an extraordinarily violent way. The next day, the Hungarian students burned the Romanian gazettes in the market’¹³³.

d) The Church – the most effective tool for the Hungarianization of both Szeklers and Romanians

At the same time as the Hungarianization of the Szeklers, the Church also began the Hungarianization of the Romanians from Szeklerland. Sabin Opreanu, an excellent connoisseur of the situation of the ethnic groups in Szeklerland, states on this subject that although the people do not care about anything else as much as they care about their religious customs, we are witnessing, almost all over Szeklerland, a transition of the Romanians to the Szekler churches (Catholic and Reformed), thus completing their assimilation. This mass transition of the believers occurred for two reasons, the first one refers to the more and more aggressive pressures they were facing, and the second one must do with the defective way of organizing the Romanian Churches (Orthodox and Greek-Catholic)¹³⁴.

The results of the Church’s involvement appeared immediately:

1. The Blaj censuses reflect a tragic situation: in the Gheorgheni protopopeat (Szeklerland) in just 12 years about 5,000 Romanians (from 22,000 in 1911 to 17,000 Greek-Catholic Romanians in 1923) disappeared¹³⁵.
2. At that time, there were 138 communes with Romanian Orthodox members, but only 38 had parish priests. The rest of the communes (100 in number) were only filii, *i.e.*, without parish priests. This explains the disappearance of the Romanian ethnic group from the Hungarian censuses¹³⁶.
3. Other examples:

¹³¹ „«Farmacistul Sandor Nagy din Tg. Mureș a maghiarizat 300 de nume», iar în azilul de copii din comuna Bârgăniș, jud. Târnava Mică, se constată: «Față de 800 copii valahi, sunt numai 200 maghiari, copiii valahi vorbesc mai corect ungrește decât cei maghiari», in *Ibidem*, pp. 208–209, *apud Ibidem*.

¹³² „S-a înființat și la Cluj o comisie permanentă pentru maghiarizare”, in *Ibidem*, pp. 205–207, *apud Ibidem*.

¹³³ „Tineretul academic maghiar a spart ferestrele localului societății «Iulia» și ferestrele locuințelor avocaților români, Coroianu și dr. Isacu. Ea s-a oprit apoi în fața locuinței prof. dr. Silași și a demonstrat în mod extraordinar de violent. Ziua următoare, studențimea maghiară a ars în piață gazetele Românești”, in *Ibidem*, p. 209, *apud Ibidem*, pp. 29–30.

¹³⁴ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹³⁵ Sabin Opreanu, *Deznaționalizarea Românilor prin religie [Denationalization of the Romanians by religion]*, Cluj, 1927, *apud Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹³⁶ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

Table 1

Decreases in the Romanian population in the 1927 census compared with the 1900 census¹³⁷

Name of municipality/city	No. of Romanians in the 1900 Hungarian census	No. of Romanians in the 1927 Hungarian census
Lăzăreni	261	2
Curteni	46	0
Bodiul	67	0
Oaia	920	67

HUNGARY'S POLICY OF HUNGARIANIZATION AFTER THE GREAT UNION OF 1918

After 1920, the policy of Hungarianization of the Szeklers and Romanians became even more aggressive. The Hungarian administration would implement this policy exemplarily¹³⁸.

Methods and concrete actions

The process of assimilation of other ethnic groups by the Hungarians were often violent. For example, in 1935, when doctor F. Basch protested the Hungarianization of surnames, he was prosecuted and sentenced to three months' imprisonment for "speaking out against the ideal of national unity of the country". The Hungarian Court of Appeal upheld the conviction, justifying it: "Hungarianization is a national problem. Whoever opposes fights against the tendencies of the state"¹³⁹.

Hungarianization was systematic. Actions affected all spheres of social life:

- a) Army: in June 1930, the Minister of the Army, J. Gombos, issued a circular obliging all officers to Hungarianize their names¹⁴⁰.
- b) Police: the prefect of the Budapest police issued a similar order¹⁴¹.
- c) So did the Minister of the Interior¹⁴².
- d) The fee for applying for Hungarianization was reduced tenfold (from 10 to 1 pengó). The Society for the Hungarianization of Names was set up to support applicants¹⁴³.
- e) Town halls: the mayor of Nagykoros, Casimir Deszo, ordered that people with foreign names should no longer be welcomed in the town¹⁴⁴.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

¹³⁹ ***, „În Ungaria, după 1920” [“In Hungary after 1920”], extract from *Gazeta Voluntarilor Cluj*, May 20, 1933, page 2, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

- f) Educational institutions: the 13 December 1933 issue of the newspaper “Pești Hirlap” reported that the director of the Royal High School in Obuda, Gayda Bela, promised that he would Hungarianize the names of 200 pupils as soon as possible¹⁴⁵.
- g) At the end of 1936, the Viennese newspaper “Nation und Staat” revealed a secret order of the Ministry of the Interior by which all state officials had to Hungarianize the names of their grandparents as well, to erase, in this way, any trace of the Hungarianization action¹⁴⁶.
- h) The newspaper “Naplo Fish” of March 2, 1932, reports that in 1930, 1454 names were Hungarianized and in 1931 2887 names. In the army, 68 names were Hungarianized in 1930 and 660 in 1931¹⁴⁷. The newspaper “Pești Hirlap” of 7 March 1934 wrote that the number of Hungarianized people reached 100,000 in that year¹⁴⁸.
- i) Between 1920–1930 (in 10 years), the number of Hungarians in Hungary increased by 850,000, while the number of Romanians decreased by more than 7,000, from 23,760 to 16,221¹⁴⁹.

Echoes in the international press about the attitude of Hungarians toward other nations

- a) Georges Clemenceau reported in the newspaper “Justice” of May 12, 1894, that education in Romanian schools had to be in Hungarian. He also pointed out that the Romanians were totally deprived of political rights. Of the 417 members of the Hungarian parliament, respecting the proportion, they should have had 75 deputies in Hungary and Transylvania, for 3.5 million inhabitants, and they had none. Freedom of the press was also absolutely illusory. For these reasons he thought that the Hungarians, who said of themselves that they loved freedom, should have recognised the same rights for the other neighbouring nationalities¹⁵⁰.
- b) H. Rocheford, the great journalist, wrote in the newspaper “L’Intransigent” of 13 May 1894 that the Romanians in Transylvania were “oppressed, persecuted and treated like animals by the Hungarians”¹⁵¹.
- c) Lord Fitzmaurice, former Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, wrote in 1890 in the Pall-Mall Gazette that “the Hungarians cultivate a blind and violent policy towards the nationalities under the Hungarian Crown, especially against the Romanians”¹⁵².

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁰ Pamfil Șeicaru, *La Roumanie dans la grande guerre [Romania in the Great War]*, Paris, Minard Publishing, 1968, apud G. Badea Lătuțeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

- d) The newspaper “Le Figaro” of 8 May 1894 noted that although the Hungarians fought for freedom and independence, the moment they gained them they became a fierce oppressor of others. In Hungary and Transylvania, there were 3.5 million Romanians who wanted to preserve their national identity by holding on to their language and religion, but the liberalism of Budapest, which was so much talked about relations with Austria, disappeared when it came to the nationalities oppressed by Budapest¹⁵³.
- e) Lev Tolstoy, speaking of Count Appony, said that although he was known abroad as a pacifist, in his own country, Hungary, he did not even recognize the non-Hungarians as human beings¹⁵⁴.

THE ETHNIC METAMORPHOSIS OF ROMANIANS IN TG. SECUIESC OR WHY THE DEMAND FOR AUTONOMY OF THE SO-CALLED “SZEKLERLAND” IS UNFOUNDED

The Church – the main element of ethnic assimilation

One argument that shows that the demands for autonomy are unfounded concerns how the Romanians in this area have been assimilated. Only four religions were recognized in Transylvania: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Unitarian. The Hungarians and the Szeklers were and still are Roman Catholics or Reformed (Calvinist or Unitarian)¹⁵⁵. The Greek Catholic confession emerged in Transylvania toward the end of the 18th century, when, because of increasing pressure, some of the Orthodox Romanians converted to Catholicism. This was a compromise solution so that they could keep their Orthodox rite but also recognize the sovereignty of the Pope. Therefore, it is clear that this confession was and still is held only by Romanians¹⁵⁶:

“Greek-Catholic (or Orthodox) ‘Hungarians’ are Romanians who have been Hungarianized in the meantime but have not left the Greek-Catholic or Orthodox confession”¹⁵⁷.

The Hungarian policy used every instrument at its disposal, no matter how reprehensible, to achieve its goal: increasing its own numbers. The proof of this is the 1910 census, the data from which prove the point¹⁵⁸:

“In the county of Treiscaune, out of 100 villages, in 32 there are no Romanians, although in 30 localities the same statistics show the existence of Orthodox and Greek-Catholic inhabitants. For example, in Buduş there are 30 Orthodox, no Romanians; in

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁵ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁷ „Singurii «maghiari» greco-catolici (sau ortodocși) n-au putut proveni numai din rândul românilor care între timp au fost maghiarizați, însă nu părăsiseră confesiunea greco-catolică, sau cea ortodoxă”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

Aita-Seacă 121 Orthodox, 180 Greek Catholics, no Romanians; in Aita de Mijloc 169 Orthodox, 11 Greek Catholics, only one Romanian; in Gemătul de Sus 32 Orthodox, 12 Greek Catholics, no Romanians; in Bicsad 676 Orthodox, 8 Greek Catholics and only 9 Romanians, etc.”¹⁵⁹

The main instrument that made possible the disappearance of the Romans from Szeklerland was therefore the Church. More precisely, between 1781–1890, Romanian priests disappeared from the statistics of the time, and with them the Romanian faithful.

Going through the 52 minutes of the “Condica of the Orthodox Church of Tg. Săcuiesc 1781–1898” we notice that in the first years we have dozens of Romanian donors and clergy, and the documents are written in Romanian. Ten years later, in 1890, in the penultimate inventory report, we notice two important things: first, the document is written in Hungarian. Second, the document is signed¹⁶⁰ by the Greek Orthodox chaplain Constantin Dimian, who appears as the sole administrator of the parishes of Lower Cernatu, Albiș, Dalnoc, Upper Cernatu, Futașfalu, Hatolyka, Ikafalu, Markosfalu, Martonfalu, Matisfalu, Moaksa, Kanta, and Kezdi Vasarhely. We note therefore that most of the villages inhabited by the Romanians in Szeklerland no longer had any priests around 1890¹⁶¹.

A final proof of the disappearance of the Romanian ethnic group from Szeklerland and the surrounding localities is a letter from the Romanians of Lower and Upper “Szeklerland”, in which they highlighted the problem and asked the Archbishopric of Sibiu for help¹⁶². The believers who signed this desperate request – asking for a Romanian Orthodox priest - according to the sound of their names, are undoubtedly Hungarians (Romanians with 100% Hungarian names: Matei, Timar, Ciorba, Radu, Bularca, Vancea etc.). According to their religion (Orthodox), they are still Romanians, and according to the “difficult circumstances” they complain about, as well as the fervent wish for an Orthodox priest to be sent to their commune, they are definitely Romanians, although all names of the signatories have a purely Hungarian sound¹⁶³.

¹⁵⁹ „în județul Treiscaune, din cele 100 sate, în 32 n-ar fi nici un român, deși în 30 de localități aceeași statistică constată existența locuitorilor ortodocși și greco-catolici. De exemplu, în Buduș există 30 ortodocși, niciun român; în Aita-Seacă 121 ortodocși, 180 greco-catolici, niciun român; în Aita de Mijloc 169 ortodocși, 11 greco-catolici, un singur român; în Gemătul de Sus 32 ortodocși, 12 greco-catolici, niciun român; în Bicsad 676 ortodocși, 8 greco-catolici și doar 9 români etc”, in G. Popa-Lisseanu, *Date privitoare la maghiarizarea Românilor [Data on the Hungarianization of Romanians]*, Bucharest, 1937, p. 37, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁰ Maria I. Negreanu, *Românii din Tg. Săcuiesc și satele învecinate [Romanians in Tg. Săcuiesc and neighbouring villages]*, Bucharest, Official Monitor, 1943, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–42.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁶² The signatories are: Mateh Jozsef, Timar Istvan, Kicsi Jozsef Bokor István, Timar Istvan, Kicsi Janos, Maten Jozsef, Olah Peter Badi, Szantha Gydrgy, Bokor Jozsef, Szabo Gybrgy, Nagy, Olah Peter Gzorba Istvan, Szabo Andras, Raduy Istvan, Vancza Peter, Raduy Mihaly, Szabo Janos, Timar Miklos, Bularka Andras, Bularka Miklos, Bokor Laszlo, Szabo Simon, Raduy Gybrgy, Kicsi Jozsef Alecsiu Popoviciu, in G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

The Szekler seats, as units of local government, were abolished by the very people who today demand them

The model of autonomy proposed by the Hungarian leaders for the localities of the so-called “Szeklerland” is invalid, since the Szekler seats as units of local government were abolished in the second part of the 19th century, during the Austro-Hungarian dualism¹⁶⁴.

First the assimilation of the Romanians by the Szeklers, then their Hungarianization

After their settlement in the inner curvature of the Carpathians (in the 12th century), gradually, as equality eroded, and with the increase in Szekler privileges, an intense “process of assimilation” occurred in the south-eastern Transylvanian area, first naturally and peacefully¹⁶⁵. In contrast to this,

“the process of Hungarianization was also conducted through violence, coercion, forced transition of the Hungarian-speaking Romanians from ethnically mixed villages to Hungarian-speaking religions, Hungarianization being an approach conceived and implemented by political factors, starting in the first half of the nineteenth century”¹⁶⁶.

The hardest moments for the Romanians in this area:

- a) first, during the period of Austro-Hungarian dualism (1867–1918), when denationalization policies were state policy¹⁶⁷
- b) secondly during the period of terror of the Hungarian occupation in 1940–1944¹⁶⁸ and
- c) thirdly during the Stalinist experiment of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. The most dramatic changes in the ethnic and confessional configuration of the Romanians in the area occurred after the Vienna Dictat in 1940. Through “arrests, mistreatment, terrorization and expulsions of the population, accompanied by measures of conversion and transition from the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic religions to other Hungarian-speaking confessions, the number of Romanians was then drastically reduced, producing a real ‘ethnic purification’ of the ‘Szeklerland’”¹⁶⁹.

Despite these assimilation policies, the population of the so-called “Szeklerland” is far from compact. Census data from 2002 showed that approx. 40% of the population of Harghita, Covasna, and Mureş counties were Romanian and Roma, *i.e.*, non-Hungarian¹⁷⁰. This is another reason, as clear and objective as possible, why autonomy based on ethnic criteria is not justified.

¹⁶⁴ Ioan Lăcătuşu in the postface of the book G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 87–88.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

ETHNIC AUTONOMY OF SZEKLERLAND – A COMMON THEME IN HUNGARIAN DISCOURSE

Less well known is the fact that Hungarian politicians have in the past wanted to create an ethnic enclave in the centre of Romania. This anti-social, unconstitutional, and anachronistic attempt at ethnic segregation led to the famous 1902 Szekler Congress in Tuşnad. The aim of this congress was to put an end to the national “calamity” faced by the Hungarians, namely the massive exodus of the Szeklers to Romania¹⁷¹.

The Szeklers emigrated en masse in the Kingdom of Romania. Between 1888 and 1890 alone, almost 30,000 passports were issued to the displaced Szeklers in Romania. In this context, Budapest officials, concerned, organized a congress in Băile Tuşnad¹⁷². The minutes and transcripts of the congress were published in a 600-page volume entitled “Szekely Kongresszus”, published by Patria in Budapest the same year. Some illustrative passages¹⁷³:

“We are diminishing, we are dying, neither war nor epidemics have caused so much depopulation”¹⁷⁴.

“In 1902, 12,436 young men were evaded from the draft and disappeared”¹⁷⁵.

“Several thousand workers were relocated to Romania”¹⁷⁶.

“Half of the Szekler dogars left for Romania”¹⁷⁷.

“The public on which our prosperity depends must be regained; it is only a stone’s throw away (in Romania)”¹⁷⁸.

CONCLUSIONS

Hungarian politics has always wanted to increase the number of its own ethnic group by any means, even by assimilation and confiscation of other ethnicities. This is still happening today, in an age when democracy condemns this process¹⁷⁹. Their political strategy constantly pursues the same goal: the growth of the Hungarian nation by weakening its neighbors, by assimilating them, so that they can become the unchallenged masters in this part of Europe¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷¹ Adrian Hamzea, *op. cit.*, apud G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.* p. 49.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁴ „Ne împușinăm, pierim, nici războiul, nici ciuma n-au provocat atâtea pustiiri”, in ***, *Szekely Kongresszus [Szekely Congress]*, Budapest, Patria Publishing, 1902, p. 568, apud Adrian Hamzea, *op. cit.*, in G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁵ „În anul 1902 s-au sustras de la încorporări 12.436 tineri, care au dispărut”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁶ „Mai multe mii de meseriași s-au strămutat în România”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁷ „Jumătate din dogarii secuii au plecat în România”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁸ „Publicul de care depinde înflorirea noastră trebuie recăștigat; el se află la doi pași (în România)”, in *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹⁷⁹ G. Badea Lătuceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

Even though the census of 2022 did not register any more Szeklers, the Szeklers were and still are the means by which the Hungarians secure their presence in Transylvania. Sensing the danger of their plan being revealed and hoping that they can continue to dissimulate it, they accuse their own victims of bad intentions¹⁸¹. The book clearly shows how “ethnic-territorial unity has been fabricated throughout history” in this region. Autonomy is claimed by the architects of the separatist policy precisely so that the ethnic composition of this region can never be changed again. Through these last-ditch efforts, the artisans of ethnic separatism will have ensured that the assimilation of the Romanians is complete and definitive¹⁸².

The Hungarianization of names was the “legal” way to turn both the Romanians and Szeklers into Hungarians forever. This is how the “Hungarian unity” of the Szeklerland was born, and this is also the basis for the “logic” of territorial autonomy based on ethnic criteria in the heart of Romania. All this is happening under the eyes of the representatives of the Romanian state, who are completely ignoring this issue even though it threatens the sovereignty of the state¹⁸³.

The book is important because it demonstrates, in the context of discussions on territorial autonomy, that this autonomy is the ultimate betrayal of the Romanian state when it comes to the Romanians of the so-called “Szeklerland” who have been abandoned and Hungarianized over time. Moreover, the identity fracture is severe because after the intense assimilation policy undertaken by the Hungarian state, they have been cleverly manipulated so that not only have they forgotten their origins and the terrors endured by their predecessors, but they have come to believe that they are Hungarians.

This is the reality based on which today’s members of the Romanian Parliament are being called upon to adopt, as quickly as possible, the establishment of territorial autonomy, so that the Romanians of the so-called “Szeklerland” will have the “right” to speak Hungarian freely and to finally be able to consider themselves Hungarians in Romania¹⁸⁴.

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¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 63.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

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