

REVIEW ARTICLES

## Hungarians in Transylvania

Andrew Ludányi

*Erdély változása: Mitoz és valóság.* By Elemér Illyés. Munich: Aurora Könyvek, 1975. Pp. 359. \$12.50.

Elemér Illyés *Erdély változása: Mitoz és valóság* (Transylvania's Transformation: Myth and Reality) is a study that is "recommended reading" for anyone who is interested in contemporary Rumanian nationalism and ethnic minority policies in Eastern Europe. The study deals with post-World War II Transylvania and the fate of its Hungarian inhabitants, thereby filling a major gap in East European studies. However, for the present, it fills this gap only in the Hungarian language.

Perhaps the healthiest feature of *Erdély változása* is that it is a very dispassionate yet simultaneously a very compassionate treatment of a neglected subject which has generated too much passion and too little compassion in years gone by. It provides a balanced and humane perspective in an area where these qualities are generally lacking. Illyés is somehow able to transcend the bitterness and nationality hatreds of the past, to provide a balanced look at this potentially volatile subject. This is an extraordinary achievement in view of the tradition of conflict, the deteriorating nationality relations of recent years and the author's personal links with the scene of action. As a consequence of this clear-headedness and fair-mindedness, both the Hungarians and the Rumanians can obtain a more complete understanding of their respective destinies in Transylvania. Indeed, his study will be difficult to surpass as "the work," "the sourcebook," on Hungarian life in Transylvania from 1944 to 1974.

It should be interjected, at this point, that the Illyés analysis extends to areas beyond the territory of historic Transylvania. While his main focus is on the area detached from Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, he also considers the fate of Hungarians in other

parts of present-day Rumania. True, most of his observations relate to the Hungarians in the Banat, Crişana, Maramureş and historic Transylvania (since these are the areas where most of them are concentrated), but he also considers the fate of their fellow nationals in Bucharest, Bacau and the coastal region of the Black Sea. Economic necessity, the quest for employment, has dispersed many Hungarians to areas outside the protective walls of the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps.

*Erdély változása* effectively documents the demographic, political, social, economic and cultural existence of Hungarians in contemporary Rumania. However, there are some weaknesses in the presentation. One relates to the author's time perspective, the other to the organization of his material. Illyés himself reflects on the former weakness in his "Conclusion," which he wrote in 1975. As he points out in this section, most of his study was written in the more optimistic "reform years" between 1968 and 1973. Consequently, the subsequent period of national discrimination was not given consideration and what is more serious, the judgements of previous years are colored by the hopefulness and the expanding opportunities of the "reform years."

The organizational, or structural weakness is, perhaps, less serious. It is due, probably, to the lack of one unifying thesis that could be traced from the first chapter to the conclusion. After all, Illyés' main concern is simply to document the transformation of Transylvania in the context of the past thirty years. To this end his presentation is acceptable. Still, it could have been done otherwise, reflecting more continuity. As it stands, it is broken roughly into five identifiable parts, each of which could stand alone without necessarily being part of the same book.

The lengthy but well-written and interesting first chapter is a combination of travelogue and historical background. Illyés cleverly intermingles his travels in Transylvania with historical "flashbacks" which provide the reader with a vivid picture of the richness and variety of the area's past. He describes each important city or region as it would look to a present-day visitor. Then in flashbacks he reflects on the inter-war experience and the events of the past thousand years that are linked to Transylvania's development.

The second chapter is an essay on the legal, *i.e.*, constitutional and political position of the Hungarians in present-day Rumania. It could stand as an independent essay. It is rather dry, but contains a wealth of useful information.

The third chapter (which deals with the population dynamics of Transylvania) and the fourth chapter (which describes the decline of the traditional Hungarian village) both deal with the circumstances and characteristics of Hungarian population changes in Transylvania. The two together are a separate section with a primarily demographic-sociological and economic orientation. They too contain a great wealth of useful information.

Chapters five to thirteen deal with the cultural and educational opportunities, or lack thereof, of the Transylvanian Hungarians. Each one of these chapters could be an independent essay on a special feature (e.g., schools, drama, painting, music, etc.) of Hungarian cultural existence. Each one is well-written and again a treasure-house of data. The author's thoroughness and the space he devotes to this analysis also indicates that this section deals with the issues and the problems which are most dear to him personally.

The last section, or chapters fourteen to seventeen, are really four separate essays which have been appended to the study to complete the overall analysis. Each chapter is in reality a book-review or series of book-reviews which deals with some aspect of Transylvanian life. Thus, chapter fourteen reviews the writings of contemporary poets while chapter fifteen reviews four essayists/novelists. Chapter sixteen is a critical review of a recent history of World War II Rumanian-Hungarian relations. Chapter seventeen is a review of the first history of Transylvania's Hungarian literature published in post-World War II Rumania. In this manner the last section of the book completes the picture, its four chapters being in a sense overviews. As such, they summarize and link together some of the information which was provided in the first thirteen chapters. However, this linkage could have been achieved more smoothly by integrating the observations of the last four essays in relevant parts of the preceding thirteen chapters.

Analytical method and the effective organization of data both contribute to the success or failure of a book's function *i.e.*, to convey information to the reader. The author's polished style and meticulous research make *Erdély változása* simultaneously interesting and highly informative reading. Only its structure leads to some duplication and awkwardness. However, the latter does not significantly detract from the book's message, which is a reviewer's main concern. In reference to the substance of his work, Illyés deserves only praise. In each of the sections, in every one of his chapters—and the work as a whole—he achieves his major objective: the provision of a documented portrait of the past thirty years in the existence of Transylvanian Hungarians.

Here the reviewer must answer only one question: Does Illyés' portrait coincide with, or accurately reflect, the actual state of affairs that he has set out to describe? His documentation in itself is thorough and presented in a systematic way. He has drawn extensively on both Rumanian and Hungarian sources. True, for recent events, the documentation is based on the "reform years" noted above. However, this provides the study with a more cautious posture relative to the entire question of restrictive minority policies. He does not fall into the trap of crying wolf when there is no wolf. Consequently, when he demonstrates that key areas of Hungarian life are under the pressure of Rumanization, we can be certain that this is the case. He points out a number of such pressure points where restrictiveness expanded even during the "reform years." The most obvious examples are the Rumanization of census results, the constantly diminishing educational opportunities for the Hungarians, the newly imposed restrictions in minority publications under the guise of a declared "paper shortage," and the continued dispersal of the Hungarian population by the restriction of job opportunities in Hungarian populated areas.

Illyés' cautiousness has other consequences as well, some positive, some negative, at times both positive and negative. An excellent example of this is his report of the destruction of the "Varjuvár," (a symbol of Hungarian cultural survival) by "some of the neighboring inhabitants of the region" (p. 13). He does not specify that it was the local Rumanians who were responsible for the destruction. While "leaning over backwards" in this way means not telling the whole truth, it is at the same time a way of avoiding accusations and finger pointing. Thus, he tries to avoid exacerbating the conflict whenever possible and to lay the foundations for a possible rapprochement in the future.

Illyés' cautiousness also keeps him from making predictions about the consequences of this state of affairs in Transylvania. He does not speculate about the prospects of Hungarian unrest in the future. His omission may be intentional. After all, Transylvania is not Cyprus, Northern Ireland or Lebanon—it is situated close to Soviet power! Yet, the experiences in the mentioned trouble spots, as well as experiences with other examples of "revolutionary circumstances," would at least lead to a guarded statement relative to Hungarian unrest. After all, the Hungarians are a large minority of two million<sup>1</sup>—more than the Turks in Cyprus, the Catholics in Northern Ireland or the Moslems or Christians in Lebanon—who have a well developed national consciousness. They have just undergone a process of decom-

pression in the cultural area. As Illyés points out, from 1968 to 1973 they enjoyed a renaissance in their cultural existence. This cultural revival is now being hemmed in by government restrictions. If deTocqueville's observations about social-economic discontent<sup>2</sup> has parallels in cultural discontent, as seems to be the case in areas torn by ethnic strife, then the prerequisites exist for a "revolutionary situation" in Transylvania today. While it is unlikely that a revolution will break out, the possibility is there at least for more pronounced ethnic conflict.

The rioting and unrest of 1968 in Yugoslavia's Autonomous Province of Kosovo should be a warning signal that Communist states are not immune to this type of malady. As an excellent recent study of communist minority policies has pointed out, the strife in Kosovo came after the Yugoslav leadership had already rejected Ranković (1966) and his high-handed methods regarding the minorities.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a process of decompression, followed by efforts to break Albanian desires for more self-government, led to the outbreaks of November-December, 1968.<sup>4</sup>

Responsible statesmen—whatever their ideological preconceptions—must take into account Transylvania's precarious ethnic relations. Illyés points out that in the case of Transylvania's fate responsible statesmen of late have rarely triumphed. Blood and anguish, and more blood and more anguish has been the price paid. We should ask: when will responsible statesmen interfere *before* bloodshed and suffering prevail? In the case of Transylvania a tolerant, farsighted . . . pluralist ethnic policy is needed now! If it is not forthcoming, the efforts of *dispassionate* and *compassionate* scholars like those of Illyés, will have been for nought. For the sake of both Rumanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, let's hope responsible statesmen are listening.

#### NOTES

1. G.D. Satmarescu, "The Changing Demographic Structure of the Population of Transylvania," *East European Quarterly* VIII (Jan., 1975), p. 438.
2. Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville's Contributions to the Theory of Revolution," in *Revolution* Ed. Carl J. Friedrich. (New York: Atherton Press, 1967), p. 78.
3. Robert R. King, *Minorities Under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension Among Balkan Communist States*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 140.
4. *Ibid.*



## France and the Fate of Hungary

Edward Chaszar

*The Tragic Fate of Hungary: A Country Carved-Up Alive at Trianon.* By Yves de Daruvar. Translated from the French by Victor Stankovich. Munich: Nemzetőr, 1974. (Co-publisher: American Hungarian Literary Guild, Astor Park, FL 32002.) Pp. 235, appendix, maps, illustr., \$8.00 paper.

For the last fifty years Hungarians have been painfully aware of the tragic fate which befell their country in June 1920, when the Peace Treaty ending World War I was forced on them at Trianon near Paris. The great majority of Frenchmen, however, were utterly unaware of what was happening to that small but valiant country which had served as Western Europe's outpost for centuries, a first line of defence against the onslaught of invaders from the East. It was the ignorance of Frenchmen about the process of treaty-making, and the silence surrounding the event once it happened, which prompted Daruvar to publish his book in France on the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris Peace Treaties.

The son of a Hungarian army officer and a French mother, transplanted to and educated in France, Daruvar fought for his adopted country in World War II, receiving high military honors and some bad wounds. "A knight in shining armour of our days," according to the words of the preface to the French edition, "he is going to war once more . . . carrying no arms; it is this book with which he proposes to fight for the honor of "mutilated" Hungary."

He does so by resorting to military tactics learned from General Leclerc: attack. Daruvar attacks the treaty-makers, and he pulls no punches in the process. Feeling morally and emotionally qualified, he makes a clean breast of the "ugly act committed by the victors of the first world war." It is this moral and emotional commitment which lends his work an eloquence and persuasiveness rarely found. No wonder a Frenchman finds his book "deeply disturbing" and hard to put down.