

REVIEW ARTICLE

Quo Vadis Transylvania?

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The Hungarian Nationality in Romania. By Institute of Political Sciences and of Studying [sic] the National Question. Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1976. 53 pp.

Transylvania: The Hungarian Minority in Rumania. By Julia Nanay. Problems Behind the Iron Curtain Series No. 10; Astor, Florida: Danubian Press, Inc., 1976. 85 pp.

Scholars are hesitant to review books, pamphlets and other works which deal with problems on a non-scholarly level. This is a serious mistake. It leaves unevaluated the writings not only of unorthodox new talent, but also the writings of charlatans, propagandists and pseudo-scholars. Yet, because the former are unrecognized and because the latter are unchallenged, society is shortchanged. Thus, unscrupulous and questionable sources may become respectable enough to be quoted for the documentation of misleading or erroneous assumptions and myths and illusions are perpetuated which should have been weeded out long ago. The perpetuation of such distortions of reality continues to plague the understanding of the historical role and the political relations of the peoples in East Central Europe as well.

Two recent additions to such popular illusion-building have been the pamphlet published by the Rumanian Institute of Political Sciences entitled *The Hungarian Nationality in Romania* and the booklet compiled by Julia Nanay for the Danubian Press of Astor, Florida, entitled *Transylvania: The Hungarian Minority in Rumania*. Both of these works were written in an emotion-filled atmosphere, seeking to justify the Rumanian and Hungarian positions respectively, relative to the treatment of Transylvania's inhabitants by the government of present-day Rumania.¹ Both as works of propaganda and as sources of informa-

tion, they leave a great deal to be desired. Yet in both there are positive as well as negative features.

In *The Hungarian Nationality in Romania*, published by the Rumanian Institute of Political Sciences, the major merit can be found in the "Annexes" which are appended to the text. Annex #1 lists the constitutional, electoral, statutory, civil-criminal, legal definitions of the Hungarians' and other nationalities' rights and obligations in present-day Rumania. Unfortunately the listing is incomplete. It neglects to discuss those laws which hinder Hungarian economic, educational and cultural opportunities in Rumania (e.g., Decree-Law 278 [May 11, 1973] which requires a minimum of 25 elementary school students and 36 high school students to maintain Hungarian classes).² However, it does provide a complete list of the positive, *symbolically* significant general references to majority-minority relations (pp. 28-34).

Annex #2 provides a list of industrial enterprises which have "been commissioned or developed during the 1966-1975 period" in those counties of Transylvania which have "a more numerous Hungarian population" (pp. 35-38). Unfortunately, the listing has a number of shortcomings. First, it fails to differentiate between "commissioned" and actually "developed" enterprises. Secondly, it does not indicate what percentage of the local Hungarian inhabitants actually benefit from these enterprises. Industrialization in itself is not always a boon to the local population. It can be, and has been, used to dilute the ethnically compact Hungarian areas of Transylvania (e.g., Cluj-Napoca [Kolozsvár], the largest city in Transylvania, was 84% Hungarian in 1890; its population has been systematically Rumanianized since 1918, mainly through industrialization and urbanization. Thus, the Hungarians' share of the total population was 83.4% in 1910. This percentage has been reduced to 54.2% by 1930, 50.3% by 1956 and 45% by 1966, so that the Rumanians [12.4% of the population in 1910] have actually become a majority of the city's inhabitants. The population of the city grew in these 85 odd years from 30,000 to over 205,000 at the present.)³ Thirdly, the listing gives only Rumanian place names, creating the impression that the towns are historically Rumanian. Any objective presentation should provide the place names of Transylvanian cities in all relevant languages (e.g., Tirgu-Mures [Marosvásárhely], Sibiu [Nagyszeben, Hermannstadt], etc.). Only such a portrayal can really acquaint people with the actual multi-national tradition and development of the area.

Annexes #3 and #4 summarize the publishing opportunities of the

Hungarians in Rumania in terms of their daily-weekly newspapers as well as monthly, bimonthly, quarterly and annual periodicals, journals and yearbooks (pp. 39-45). This provides a profile of existing Hungarian publications in Rumania. It is a useful listing insofar that it indicates the age, concern, frequency of publication, number of copies and number of pages of the various papers and periodicals appearing in Hungarian. Shortcomings of the listing are primarily two. First, it does not relate the vital statistics of these publications to their previous development. For example, it does not tell us whether the 25,000 copies of *Igazság* (published in Cluj-Napoca [Kolozsvár]) is an improvement over the past or a reduction. The same is also true in reference to the number of pages or the frequency of appearance of each one of these publications. In view of the cutbacks announced in 1974 because of a "paper shortage," it would be interesting to compare the statistics given for 1976 with those of 1973 or 1969 or 1966. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare the ratio of cutbacks in minority publications with cutbacks among majority publications. A second shortcoming is that this listing provides place names, again, only in Rumanian.

The last "Annexes" in *The Hungarian Nationality in Romania* (pp. 48-52, not numbered) are three press excerpts, two from the Hungarian literary weekly *Élet és Irodalom* (Budapest) and one from *Target*, the paper of the Fifth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council held at Nairobi, Kenya in 1975. These excerpts are direct responses to specific charges against Rumanian policies relative to freedom of publication and religion. The first two excerpts commend Rumanian efforts in the publishing field, while the third one is a favorable testimony by minority church leaders from Rumania. There is no place to reflect on the specific testimonies. It is perhaps enough to note two weaknesses. In the case of the first two excerpts, the information is provided without any explanation of their objective. Thus, in themselves they are incomplete and incomprehensible for an uninitiated audience. In the case of the third excerpt, the testimony includes an explanation, but it comes from a source which is obviously constrained and not disinterested. The excerpts also suffer from numerous English mistakes in style and composition (e.g., "mispresented" instead of "misrepresented" on p. 53) and from errors in facts and/or evaluation. For example, on p. 52, it is contended that: "Religious journals are printed by the Protestant Churches in Hungarian and German languages, for their clergy, for their theological schools as well as for their believers." As Annex #4 (p. 43) points out, there are only two Hungarian language religious publications, *Református Szemle* and *Keresztény Magvető*. The former is a

bimonthly appearing in 1,000 copies, while the latter is a quarterly appearing in 500 copies. It is unlikely that these are capable of satisfying an audience composed of 700,000 Calvinist, 700,000 Roman Catholic, 50,000 Unitarian and 30,000 Evangelical readers (p. 23).⁴

The text of *The Hungarian Nationality in Romania* does not even possess the limited value of its annexes. It is clearly and simply *apologia*. Altogether the text is only twenty-one pages (pp. 5-26). It is divided into four sections, providing a historical-demographic background, a brief review of economic, political and social conditions, a discussion of educational and cultural opportunities and a summary of religious rights as these relate to the Hungarians.

The presentation attempts to provide an easily understandable and favorable picture of Rumania's treatment of its Hungarian population. It does not succeed for both stylistic and substantive reasons. Awkward sentences, misspelled words (*e.g.*, "monther tongue" p. 24, "jear" p. 43) and inappropriate word usage (*e.g.*, "swap of experience" instead of "exchange of experience" p. 43) hinder an effective communication of the message. Similarly, substantive errors or distortions are bound to irritate the informed observers of East Central European affairs. Examples of the latter include the blurring of the significance of certain statistics by relating them to an imprecise time perspective. In relation to the publication of religious books in Hungarian, the given statistics are related to "the last few years" (p. 25). What does this mean? The last two, five or ten years? Another example is the statement that Dávid Ferenc (1520-1579), the founder of Hungarian Unitarianism, was born in Cluj-Napoca (p. 25). In 1520 there was no such city! To be historically accurate, he was born in Kolozsvár [Klausenburg], today renamed Cluj-Napoca. This use of only Rumanian place names, even when they do not fit the context, is a recurring abuse. In the first section entitled "General Data", other questionable or misleading statements are also made. On p. 6, it is contended that the "Hungarian feudal state" only came into being "in the 12th century." On this same page it is also contended that the "Szecklers (*i.e.*, Székelys) . . . lived alongside the Romanians from whom they also learned the art of writing." It is indeed ironic that such claims can be put forward when the only *written* source used by present day Rumanian historians to "prove continuity" in medieval Transylvania is the *Gesta Hungarorum* of the Hungarian King Bela III.

Julia Nanay's *Transylvania: The Hungarian Minority in Rumania* is not as blatantly propagandistic. Yet, it is also ineffective in shedding light on the actual state of affairs in Transylvania. It, too, is weighted

down by serious shortcomings in both presentation and content. This is really unfortunate, because Nanay's little book could have become something more than an ineffective propaganda pamphlet. With a few re-writings, a strict editor who could have weeded out unsupported generalizations and factual errors, and a thorough proofreading, it could have become a useful little handbook on Transylvania and the fate of its Hungarian inhabitants.

From the "Foreword" and "Table of Contents" to the "Appendixes" and maps, the presentation is marred by all sorts of weaknesses. The maps included in the booklet are either hand-drawn by an amateur or reproduced from some other source without giving credit to the original source. The hand-drawn map on p. 23 is an example of hasty preparation. The two maps reproduced at the end of the book are too dark and are not even properly labeled.

The carelessly prepared maps are used to supplement a poorly written text. Practically every page contains a meaningless sentence, a weakly constructed paragraph or an inaccurately used concept, phrase or word. Two examples will have to suffice. On p. 11, the following sentence appears: "Nationalism emerged as one of the heroic stalwarts of national unity and oftentimes, of minority anguish." and, on p. 28, "Disunity was a direct consequence of a meshing of allegiances." Similar examples could be listed *ad infinitum*.

Confused word usage and inconsistent use of place names makes *Transylvania: The Hungarian Minority in Rumania* even less understandable. Like the Meridiane publication, the Astor, Florida brochure also uses mainly Rumanian place names. On p. 25 an effort is made to provide Hungarian names for the cities along the present Rumanian-Hungarian border. The result is "Nagy Károly" and "Nagy Bányá," when it should be "Nagykároly" and "Nagybánya." More serious, but just as uneducated, is the misquoting of the formula for Stalinist nationality policy as "nationalistic in form, socialistic in substance" (p. 30) when it should be "national in form, socialist in substance." A similarly serious weakness is the loose use of the word "race" instead of nationality or ethnicity when discussing population statistics on pp. 31-36. Other abuses would be the terms "fascist" on p. 19 and the term "judeo-communism" on p. 24. This sampling is merely the tip of an immense iceberg of word abuses and name errors.

Incorrect labeling of social reality indicates an inadequate grasp of that reality. It also indicates a lack of rigorous research. Results of the latter shortcoming are also legion. Only the most glaring instances will be mentioned. In the "Foreword" on p. 5 it is contended that: "The U.S.

is alone in the world in basing its population growth on multi-national immigration." What about Brazil, Canada and Australia, to mention only the most obvious others?! On pp. 31-35, reference is made to the census of 1952 and statistics are quoted based on this census. There was no census taken by Rumania in that year. The only post-war censuses this reviewer is aware of are those of 1948, 1956, 1966 and one that is being processed at the present writing. In Appendix II "Geopolitical and Demographic Features of Transylvania," reference is made to an article written by G. Satmarescu for a journal entitled *East Central Europe* "edited by Professor Fischer-Galati of the University of Colorado" (p. 85). According to this reference, the Satmarescu article estimated that there were 2.4 million Hungarians in Rumania. This is in error in one respect; the Satmarescu article appeared in the *East European Quarterly*, VIII, No. 4 (Jan., 1975) not *East Central Europe!*

More serious than the above errors is the unquestioned acceptance of the Rumanian propaganda position relative to the Second Vienna Award of 1940. In the "Table of Contents" (p. 7) we can read the following: "The Vienna Diktat and the release [sic] of northern Transylvania to Hungary." This is seconded by the discussion that follows on pp. 22-25. Time after time the Vienna Award is referred to as a "Diktat." It is the height of inefficiency for a Hungarian propaganda brochure to support the claims of Rumanian propaganda. The Vienna Award was the result of an arbitral decision. Hitler's fear of military complications on the eve of the attack on the Soviet Union led him to exert pressure on Rumania and Hungary to resolve their dispute over Transylvania. Both were constrained to make a formal request for arbitration. The award was based on a presentation of both the Rumanian and the Hungarian claims to the area. At the arbitration table Germany's Ribbentrop favored the Rumanians while his Italian opposite number, Ciano, favored the Hungarians. Finally a compromise was worked out between the two positions which divided Transylvania between Rumania and Hungary. Furthermore, the population of Northern Transylvania had a Hungarian plurality (1,380,506 Hungarians to 1,029,470 Rumanians) while Southern Transylvania had a Rumanian majority (2,274,561 Rumanians to 363,206 Hungarians) with the remainder of the population made up mainly of Germans, Jews and Serbs.⁵ The Rumanian population statistics used by the author to condemn this decision are highly questionable on the basis of her own discussion of Rumanian census figures (pp. 32-36) as well as other available Rumanian and Hungarian census results.⁶

The "Diktat" blunder is even more surprising in light of the more

balanced presentation of the Vienna Award provided in Appendix I, "An Historical Background," (p. 83). It is hard to imagine that the author of the brochure was unfamiliar with the contents of Appendix I. At the same time, this Appendix (pp. 79-84) is the best written and most effectively presented part of the entire booklet. Unfortunately there is no indication from where these pages have been obtained. The analysis of the content, however, convinces this reviewer of two things: One, that the author of this Appendix was not the same person as the author of the entire brochure. Two, that the Appendix is taken from a more dated source. Since no mention is made in it of the most recent Rumanian Constitution (1967), but the 1952 document is specifically cited (p. 84), we can surmise that it was written sometime in the late 1950's or early 1960's, — too long ago to be the work of the brochure's young author.

Aside from Appendix I, the Bibliography (pp. 75-77) deserves some praise. It includes many of the English-language sources that relate to the fate of contemporary Transylvania and the destiny of East Central Europe. It could have been a little more selective, but for the purpose of the booklet in question, it is more than adequate. In retrospect, the text does not reflect an adequate awareness of the wealth of information listed in the bibliography. The extensive footnoting notwithstanding (pp. 59-74), the brochure remains a research paper that has been hastily prepared for publication. The footnotes indicate merely that a great deal of effort has been exerted to compile the information. However, it is not effective documentation. Some of the explanatory footnotes reflect the same unclarity as the text. One example is footnote #17, which states: "Xenophobia, like patriotism, enters into nationalism but is not a part of its doctrinal composition." Footnote #23, on the other hand, must have been left out when the brochure was rushed to the printer. I seriously doubt that anyone in Astor, Florida read more than the title of *Transylvania: The Hungarian Minority in Rumania*, either before or after it left the printer. This is irresponsible, and it is unfair, not just to the readers interested in Transylvania, but also to the young author whose name is linked to the brochure.

Aside from shoddy workmanship, both of the booklets reviewed are objectionable for one other, more weighty, reason. The appearance of these booklets will not draw Rumanians and Hungarians to understand each other any better. No serious effort is made in either instance to present an objective analysis. Thus, old myths and illusions are reinforced, thereby projecting into the future the nationality hatreds of the recent past. An effort at an objective evaluation — which would also have demonstrated the many shortcomings of present-day Rumanian

treatment of Transylvanian Hungarians — would have avoided the intensification of polemics. Instead, it could have opened the door to a discussion on a question that requires understanding, honesty and humanity on *both sides!*

NOTES

1. The news of deteriorating majority-minority relations, with distinctly adverse consequences for the minority, prompted many Hungarian-Americans to demonstrate against Rumanian policies. These demonstrations (May 8, 1976, in front of the Rumanian Permanent Mission of the United Nations in New York, and June 16, 1976, in front of the Capitol, Washington, D.C.) coincided with Rumanian efforts to obtain the "most-favored-nation" trading status with the United States. The Meridiane booklet appeared during the summer of 1976 almost in direct response to these demonstrations and the lobbying on Capitol Hill. The Danubian Press, in turn, came out with its publication in the fall of 1976. For more information on the events of 1976 see: "Rumania's Most Favored Nation Status and Human Rights Violations Against the Hungarian Minority in Rumania: Speeches, Public Statements and Interviews of U.S. Senators and Congressmen, May-November 1976," Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, New York, Dec., 1976, and "Testimony of László Hámos on Continuing Most-Favored-Nation Tariff Treatment of Imports from Rumania," before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means; New York: Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, Sept. 14, 1976. For the series of news stories which sparked all this activity see: "Bureaucratic Chicanery against the Churches in Rumania," *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (Zürich, Switzerland) Feb. 1/2, 1975; "Transylvania's Ethnic Strains," *The Financial Times* (London) April 2, 1975; "New Curbs on Art Likely in Rumania," *New York Times*, May 28, 1976; and "Repression Rise Seen in Rumania, Emigration and Travel Is Held Further Restricted," *New York Times*, May 30, 1976.
2. "Transylvania's Ethnic Strains," *The Financial Times*, *Ibid.*
3. The ethnic evolution of all the major Transylvanian cities is summarized in the as yet unpublished "Statistical Studies on the Last Hundred Years in Central Europe" compiled by the Mid-European Center, New York, 1968. Also see: G. D. Satmarescu, "The Changing Demographic Structure of the Population of Transylvania," *East European Quarterly* VIII (Jan., 1975), pp. 432-433; Elemer Illyes, *Erdély változása: Mitosz és valóság* (München: Aurora, 1975), p. 17.
4. These Rumanian statistics on the number of Calvinists, Roman Catholics, Unitarians and Evangelicals is probably much too low. However, even if we would accept them as a valid estimate, their correlation with the total number of copies of religious publications (p. 43) is in itself incriminating!
5. *Recensământul General al României din 1941 6 Aprilie: Date Sumare Provizorii* (Bucuresti: Institutul Central de Statistica, 1944), Table 1, p. ix; "Rezultatele Recensământului Maghiar 1941," *Comunicari Statistice*, No. 1 (Jan. 15, 1945), Table 18, pp. 14-15.
6. *Ibid.*