

MINISTER PETRESCU-COMNEN'S "NATIONALITY EXCHANGE" SCHEME AND — THE FACTS

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The December 2nd. issue of the "Daily Mail" publishes a telegram from Bucharest containing a statement made by the Rumanian Foreign Minister, M. Petrescu-Comnen, in an interview with Mr. Ward Price. The article was introduced by characteristic headlines — "Rumania Has Plan For Minorities", "Exchange With Hungary" — and contained the following remarks on the Hungarian minority question by M. Petrescu-Comnen.

The Rumanian Foreign Minister recalled that it was he who had presided over the negotiations the result of which was the Bled Agreement of August last, when the Governments of Czecho-Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania agreed to waive the prohibitions placed upon Hungary by the Peace Treaty to possess anything more than a miniature army.

"That concession on our part was meant to be not an end but a beginning," he said. "We want to be on good terms with Hungary."

In reply to the inquiry as to whether Rumania were prepared to recognise the principle of ethnical frontiers laid down by Germany for Central Europe, M. Comnen declared that the Hungarian population of Transylvania, the province

annexed by Rumania from Hungary, was largely concentrated in the towns, and was lost to view in a solid block of Rumanians, and that, though there might be groups of Hungarian population mixed up with Rumanians and other minorities, Hungarian claims for revision could not be satisfied.

"The Hungarians," he declared, "do not claim a few square miles along the border; they want nothing less than the return of the whole of Transylvania, which no Rumanian statesman could ever contemplate."

The statement made by M. Petrescu-Comnen, the Rumanian Foreign Minister, is a veritable surprise in view of the Munich Agreement, which by asserting the validity of the ethnic principle denoted a considerable progress towards an alleviation of the strain between the countries concerned. The Rumanian Foreign Minister has now openly defied this principle, as well as the logic of history, refusing to take cognizance of the ethnic reparation effected in Czecho-Slovakia or to learn the useful lessons involved, and has actually flouted the facts demonstrable even with the data of the Rumanian official statistics, finally coming forward with a proposal which cannot be taken seriously to the effect that the Rumanians in Hungary should be exchanged for the Magyars in Rumania.

The Minister's statement certainly is right in noting that the Magyars in Transylvania are town-dwellers. All the culture, science, literature and art radiating from the towns of Transylvania is really due to the work of the Magyar and Saxon inhabitants of the Transylvanian towns. But, if he investigates the statistical data, the Minister will have to acknowledge the following facts: —

1. In the territory lying between Ugocsa and Nagyvárad, in the area between Cséffa and Kisjenő, and in the environs of Arad and Pécska, — in direct connection with the Magyars of the Lowlands of Trianon Hungary and not

separated from those Magyars by any natural frontier —, there are living today under Rumanian rule more than 400,000 Magyars representing more than 84% of the total population of these areas (476.000 souls). And by way of parenthesis I would note that these 400.000 Magyars would mean an addition to the population of Hungary practically speaking just as important relatively to the strength of the population as the incorporation of the Sudeten German districts meant to Germany. The re-incorporation of this territory of only some 5000 sq. kilometres would not involve any material territorial loss to Rumania, but would contribute very largely to relieve the ethnic tension, a circumstance which would certainly be of advantage to Rumania also from the point of view of the political atmosphere prevailing there.

To give the exact data, the five zones of the character described subjected to Rumanian rule represent a total area of 5230 sq. kilometres and contain 220 townships and villages with an aggregate population of 509,563 souls. Racially this population is divided as follows: —

Magyars	413,804 = 81.0%
Rumanians	61,784 = 12.1%
Germans	17,324 = 3.4%

2. In the compact area comprising the Székler Counties (Csík, Háromszék, Udvarhely, Marostorda) and the adjacent areas there are at least 600,000 Magyars, the bulk of the latter not merely forming an urban island in a Rumanian language ocean, but being the inhabitants of a huge compact language area of great vitality consisting of extensive tracts of arable land, mountains, and valleys. And this language area could be connected easily with the Magyars of the Hungarian Lowlands by means of a comparatively short corridor not including any persons of other nationality. The force of ethnic community is a powerful and eternally active

factor the attraction of which — as recent events also show — is stronger than that of a will working under the influence of prejudice or passion.

The Minister believes that the ethnic principle might be enforced by exchanging the Rumanians living in Hungary for the Magyars living in Transylvania. Apparently the Minister is not aware that the number of Rumanians living within the territory of Trianon Hungary is only altogether 16,000, whereas the number of Magyars living in Rumania — is 1.800,000, it being computed at 1.400,000 even by the rather unreliable official Rumanian statistics. Not to speak of the arithmetical disproportion and of the physical and material obstacles precluding the removal and re-settlement of such a mass of people, we cannot but regard as opposed to all human feeling and as in defiance of the philosophy of history the very suggestion of removing hundreds of thousands of human beings from the soil of their ancestors and from the places where they have secured a subsistence and wiping off the surface of the soil a people which has lived and toiled there for ten centuries and has engraved its name in letters of gold on the pages of history.