

# THE NATIONALITY QUESTION IN HUNGARY

BY

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The "Slovenska Pravda" (a Slovak newspaper) of 2nd December contained an article which in the interest of peaceful co-operation between the peoples of the Danube Basin must not be allowed to pass without comment. This article was entitled "Rumania's First of December", and, treating of the Rumanian National Assembly held at Gyulafehérvár on 1st December 1918, it warmly congratulated Rumania on the 24th anniversary of the day when Transylvania was attached to that country. Word for word the "Slovenska Pravda" said: — "Rumania has always asserted, and today European science agrees, that the cradle of the Rumanian race was the region once known as Dacia. The history of that region must be regarded as Rumanian history. The struggle for religious and cultural liberty was followed by a political struggle against alien tyranny waged by the Slovaks and also the Rumanians of the Carpathian Basin." Farther on the article says: — "No Rumanian can ever repudiate the Resolution of Gyulafehérvár, which attached all the areas of historical Hungary inhabited by Rumanians to Rumania. This Resolution will always be sacred to every Rumanian."

*In the well-understood interests of the common European front, Hungary and the Hungarian Press have always met the attacks launched against them by their neighbours, who in an ever-sensitive frame of mind complain of imaginary injustices, with dignity and restraint. In the present case, too, we would, calmly and confidently, point out that what the "Slovenska Pravda" says is neither entirely true nor in accordance with the political requirements of the moment. It was a mistake to appeal to European science and present the theory of Daco-Rumanian*

continuity propounded by Rumanian historians as a generally accepted opinion. The undeniably Balkan character of the Rumanian language, which so closely resembles Albanian and the Bulgarian Slav language, the indisputable linguistic unity that shows how cognate the three Rumanian dialects of the Balkans — the Macedo-, Megleno, and Istro-Rumanian tongues — are, the markedly Byzantine type of Rumanian culture, and a host of linguistic, historical and cultural facts all go to prove that the Rumanians migrated from the Balkans in the first centuries of the Middle Ages, first into their present home and thence to Transylvania. Dacia was the last province to be conquered by Rome and the first to be lost, and the 160 years of Roman rule there were not a period of peaceful development, but of continual fighting and destruction, so it is scarcely probable that any traces of the Romans should have remained. The theory of Daco-Rumanian continuity is not accepted today by European historians except by those who apply without criticism the methods successfully used in the case of the western Latins to the radically different problems of the eastern Latins. There are even Rumanian historians who have abandoned the Daco-Rumanian theory and declare that the Rumanian people are not the descendants of a mixed Dacian and Roman ancestry, but of an ancient Latin race that lived somewhere between the Carpathians and the Balkan mountains. This would make the Rumanian language the aunt, not the sister, of the Spanish, French and Italian tongues. If this were true, it would mean that Rome and the whole western Latin world was founded by Latins who broke away from an ancient Rumanian stem. We ask the question: which theory is right, the "Scoala latinistá" theory of Daco-Rumanian continuity, or the megalomaniacal "Lupu" pre-Latin theory which serves as the historical basis for the new Rumanian imperialism? Both are very improbable, and, contradicting each other, they rob each other of the modicum of probability generously credited to them by biassed historians. Out of the confusion caused by the two mutually contradictory theories emerges with all the greater authenticity and probability the only acceptable theory, viz. that

the cradle of the Rumanian race is to be sought in the Balkan Peninsula, and that its language was preserved by a Balkan shepherd tribe which was Romanized during five centuries of Roman rule.

Even less objective and less in accordance with the real facts is the assertion made by the "Slovenska Pravda" that "the struggle for religious and cultural liberty was followed by a political struggle against alien tyranny waged by the Slovaks and also the Rumanians of the Carpathian Basin." The Rumanians of the Carpathian Basin had no need to struggle for religious and cultural liberty, for in their new home, Magyar Transylvania, they found the classical land of religious and cultural liberty. It was in Transylvania that the Rumanian people and the Rumanian spirit were first able to cast off the Slav cocoon that centuries of life in the Balkans had spun round them. It was in Transylvania that the Rumanian language was first heard in their churches, instead of the language of the Pravoslav Orthodox Church. It was the Magyar Princes of Transylvania whose strict laws made it obligatory for the Rumanian priests to preach in their national tongue. It was Magyar and Saxon patrons who paid for the first Rumanian translations of the Bible, which marked the beginnings of the Rumanian literary language. There is therefore no truth in what the "Slovenska Pravda" says about the Rumanians of Transylvania having had to fight for religious and cultural liberty; on the contrary, the flame of Rumanian national liberty that flared up in Transylvania had to struggle against the Pravoslav darkness and slavery that obtained in Moldavia and Muntenia. It was teachers and scholars educated in Transylvania who first realized their Latin origin and who imbued with this inspiring belief the Rumanians who at that time were languishing in the shackles imposed on them by the Slav world and by Byzance. It was teachers and priests from Transylvania who first showed their brethren in Muntenia and Moldavia how to educate a people and make of them a nation. *All this would have been impossible if in Transylvania, instead of the light of liberty, the darkness of tyranny had reigned.* Neither is it true that after the struggle for religious and cultural liberty

the Rumanians had to fight political battles against alien tyranny, for — apart from the deeds for which Austrian rule was responsible — Transylvania was always the land of political liberty. Already in the Middle Ages Transylvania could boast of a well-defined system of liberty as represented by the Estates, in which system every race and religion could obtain the place to which by virtue of its capacities and merits it was entitled. *That the Rumanians of Transylvania suffered no disadvantage may be proved by the fact that their economic position and their social and political standards were many times better than those of their kindred in the Old Kingdom (the Regate).* In 1907, although the proportion of Rumanians in Transylvania was only 53 per cent of the population, they owned 55 per cent of the arable land. Only 15 per cent of the land in Transylvania was in the hands of the owners of large estates, at a time when in Rumania they owned 40 per cent of the land, which in that year (1907) led to the greatest peasant rising known to modern social history. There could have been no question of political struggles against Magyar rule, stigmatized by the "Slovenska Pravda" as "alien tyranny", if only for the reason that under Magyar rule the Rumanians enjoyed complete religious and cultural autonomy. As Onosifor Ghibu, a Rumanian authority on education, admits in a pedagogic report (*Viata si organizatia bisericeasca si scolara in Transylvania si Ungaria*), in 1914 the Rumanians of Transylvania had one elementary school to every 980 inhabitants, while in Old Rumania there was only one to every 1418. According to that same report, the Hungarian Government gave annual grants of 4.700.000 gold crowns to the Rumanian Greek Oriental Church for its priests and schools and about the same sum to the Rumanian Greek Catholic Church. That the Rumanians of Transylvania are the most wealthy, most healthy, best educated and politically the most mature section of the Rumanian nation, proves beyond a doubt that the Rumanians were never oppressed in Transylvania. It is true that before the first world war their leaders came into conflict with the Hungarian executive power and had to be punished with all the severity of the law, but for these regrettable

events those leaders were themselves partly responsible and partly certain politicians on the other side of the Carpathians. Incited by the latter, the leaders of the Rumanians in Transylvania launched a campaign of unbridled propaganda against the Hungarian State, using language in their pamphlets and newspapers and at their meetings that could not be tolerated in a civilized country. In his "*Istoria Contimporană a României*" Titus Maiorescu, a distinguished Rumanian politician in the Regate, writes of that historical incident as follows: — "...Under its new leaders the Liberal Party (Opposition) prepared a programme of systematic and violent propaganda, choosing, as the most suitable weapon for its purposes, the Transylvanian question as the nucleus of that programme. From that moment on this so-called "national" question was accorded the greatest attention in newspaper articles, at public meetings and in Parliament. It was fully exploited and use was made of all the other methods of creating a disturbance that are so familiar to us in the history of the Liberal Party, such as stirring up the students and the officers, involving the person of the King in the matter and marching out of Parliament.

"Sturdza (the new Chairman of the Liberal Party) ...sent an able writer of short stories to Nagyszeben to start a newspaper entitled the "Tribuna". Slavici's skill as a writer of fiction must have been very useful, for the seed sown by the "Tribuna" soon bore fruit; discord was created among the Rumanians beyond the Carpathians, and the sectarian spirit which works like a poison in the political parties in free Rumania began to spread among them. In a very short time party adherents of Dimitrie Sturdza made their appearance as Liberals in Trans-carpathia, in opposition to whom — one extreme breeding another — Take Jonsescu's party adherents, calling themselves Conservatives, soon turned up too, and now alongside of this unfortunate strife the Rumanians of Transylvania began to believe in growing numbers that their political guidance must come from the political parties on the other side of the Carpathians.

"Contemporaneously with the unrest fomented in Nagy-

szeben, Brassó and Arad a campaign of propaganda was launched in Bucharest and Yassy. On 9th January 1892 the meeting of the Rumanians of Transylvania held at Nagyszeben resolved to go behind the Hungarian Government and carry a memorandum on the situation of the Rumanians in Transylvania to the Emperor Francis Joseph. When the Emperor refused to see the delegation, the university students of Bucharest and Yassy staged a 'demonstration of sympathy' with the Rumanians of Hungary (9th June 1892). On the occasion of the King's speech to the Senate on 27th November 1893 and at a session of the Senate (9th and 10th December 1894) Dimitrie Sturdza delivered two great speeches in which he openly discussed the relations existing between the Hungarian Government and the Rumanians of Transylvania. He declared it was the duty of the Liberal Party to clear up that difficult and obscure situation. He then dealt in detail with the demands of the Rumanians, describing the Hungarian Government's policy as 'preposterous', 'unjust' and 'befitting Asiatic barbarians rather than a European nation.'

Farther on Maiorescu describes the political agitation attending the famous trial of those responsible for the memorandum as follows: — "...Sturdza advised them (the men sentenced) to escape punishment and remove the headquarters of their activity to Bucharest. This advice shows so little judgment that no one would have credited a man at home in public affairs with giving it, had not Sturdza's letter urging the leaders of the Rumanians in Transylvania to escape to Rumania been published in the "Tribuna". The political leaders under sentence were wise enough not to take his advice, preferring to submit themselves to the punishment imposed on them by the Hungarian State. In any case they were all pardoned, some sooner some later, the most of them after a short term of imprisonment lasting 13 months and 10 days.

"Sturdza was furious. At a public meeting held on 25th September 1898 in the "Orfeu" Hall he delivered the notorious speech in which he gave the number of the orders to pay served on Transylvania by Take Jonescu, repeated his invectives against the Hungarian Government, and told

the Rumanian Government it was its duty to assist the Rumanians living in the neighbouring State.

"While the Chairman of the Party was making these statements its official organ continued to inveigh against the Magyars, using expressions so coarse that, if that were possible, they outdid Sturdza'. This newspaper never called the Magyars anything but "Huns", "barbarians", and "the murderers of the Rumanian people..."

This is how the political struggle waged by the Rumanians of Transylvania against alien "tyranny" is described in his exact and true account of the events by Titus Maiorescu, one of Rumania's most outstanding statesmen and writers. The notorious memorandum and the violent campaign of propoganda against Hungary conducted by certain leaders of the Rumanians in Transylvania were nothing but an attack launched by the Liberal Party against all the principles of international courtesy and were merely part of their unbridled party politics in the field of domestic policy.

We would advise the "Slovenska Pravda" to make a closer examination of the documents of the case before pronouncing sentence on so intricate and thorny a question as that of the relations between the Magyars and the Rumanians.