

“We do not want Foreign Strongholds within Our National State” – the Romanian Educational Policy and the Historically Established Churches between the Two World Wars¹

CSABA MÁTÉ SARNYAI

Károli Gáspár University, Department of General Humanities
Budapest, 4 Reviczky Street, 1088, Hungary
sarnyai.csaba.mate@gmail.com

The First 20 Years of Denominational Education in Romania

Four periods can be distinguished with regard to the governmental actions and public attitude.²

The so-called transitional period lasted from 1918 to 1922. The first two years were about the foundation of the new establishment, under the supervision of the governing council³. They acted in the spirit of the Alba Iulia decrees and they claimed to entrust the church with the organization of minority education. In theory, Hungarian laws were considered relevant when authorizing the creation of new schools. Teaching Romanian language and Romanian national subjects were introduced; geography, history and constitutional law of Romania. In the beginning, these could be taught in the mother tongue of the given minority. After the termination of the governing council, the minister of the new government, Petre P. Negulescu took over the supervision. His attitude represented the growing Romanian nationalism, he claimed that state schools were more useful than denominational ones.⁴

¹ This research is supported by the National Scientific and Research Fund (Országos Tudományos és Kutatási Alap) (application number: PD 76004).

² S. BÍRÓ, *Az erdélyi magyar iskola keresztútja*, in: Magyar Szemle, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1941, p. 27.

³ Consiliu Dirigent.

⁴ BÍRÓ, p. 27.

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The complete turn in attitude came in 1922, during the first ministerial period of Anghelescu⁵ of the national liberal party. The first suppressive era lasted until 1933. In this period, politics opposed denominational education.⁶ Negotiations were started about the issue of the expropriation of Romanian denominational (Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic) schools. The reaction to the refusal was that financial support from the state was denied. As a consequence, the teachers “demanded” the expropriation of schools by means of a decree. The bill was drafted, but the process was interrupted by the fall of the Avarescu-regime⁷. The expropriation was finally completed during Anghelescu’s ministerial term.⁸

Within the new borders, the political elite of the majority nation made efforts to inhibit the undisturbed operation of those institutions that maintained and nurtured the Hungarians’ identity, language and culture. “*We do not want foreign strongholds within our national state.*”⁹

There were two possible means to hinder the operation of the aforementioned institutions. Either all of the denominational schools are eliminated, or they can be ousted and forced out by the installation of state schools. Due to reasons of diplomacy and foreign affairs, they decided for the latter. Anghelescu was appointed minister during the reign of the liberal party, in the spring of 1922. His hungarophobia was publicly known.¹⁰ There were three main means of acting against educational institutions. The first was draining the incomes necessary for the upkeep of schools, through the agrarian act. As a result, 20 thousand kh (kataszteri hold – an obsolete

⁵ June 10, 1869 – September 14, 1948. Physician, university teacher, minister of education and prime minister, the “kultúrzóna” was created under his supervision

⁶ BÍRÓ, p. 27.

⁷ March 9, 1859 – October 3, 1938 – soldier, prime minister.

⁸ BÍRÓ, p. 28.

⁹ Ibidem. There were statements in opposition to this, but they were never realised in practice. See *The Transylvanian Catholic Status before the Senate: the speech of lay chairman Elemér Gyárfás and the reply from N. Jorga Prime Minister in the February 12, 1932, Senate session*, in: Erdélyi Tudósító, Is. 5, 1932, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

measurement unit of area, equals 0.57 hectares) of the 24,000 kh Roman Catholic agricultural and forest lands became seized by 1922.¹¹ Usually there was no compensation for the seized lands, or if there was, the devaluating bills of credit actually failed to solve the financial problems. This led not only to the profound financial crisis of the Status, but the upkeep of the educational institutes became threatened as well.¹² The enormous gap between incomes and expenses brought a very severe situation for the school managements. Another means of financial ruination was the withholding of state grants and benefits.¹³ The second field of intervention was the curbing of schools' publicity rights (to be considered as official public schools), the third was the termination of the autonomy of schools. Where these disadvantageous measures were not applied, the institutions were immediately closed. There were several hundreds of schools that were eliminated by these means, in the course of one year.¹⁴ According to the 6th article of the circular decree No. 6505,¹⁵ issued by the Kolozsvár state secretariat for public education, members of different denominations could no longer attend each other's schools. There had been no equivalent restriction under Hungarian control. Even Onisifor Ghibu, a professor in Kolozsvár known for his anti-Hungarian sentiment, told about this issue in a contemporary official report.¹⁶ The Romanian-language teaching of the national subjects was also introduced. The 1924 elementary

¹¹ A. BALÁZS, *Adatok az erdélyi kisebbségek iskolavédelmi küzdelmeihez 1919–1929*, in: *Minerva irodalmi és nyomdai műintézet részvénytársaság*, Cluj-Kolozsvár 1930, p. 221.

¹² J. SCHEFFLER, *Az „Erdélyi Katolikus Státus” küzdelmes húsz éve*, in: *Magyar Szemle*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 1941, p. 300. 50-year bonds were issued in exchange for the lands with an annual interest of 5%, but many did not actually receive there either. See Z. SZÖVÉRDY, *Milyen az erdélyi agrárreform valóságban?*, in: *Magyar Szemle*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1928, p. 348.

¹³ I. SULYOK, *Végső veszedelemben középfokú oktatásunk III.*, in: *Magyar Kisebbség*, Vol. 2, No. 13, 1923, p. 497. The state aid that was due according to the 10th article of the minority treaty was paid only once, in 1921 See AZ ERDÉLYI KATHOLICIZMUS MULTJA ÉS JELENE, *Erzsébet Könyvnyomda Részvénytársaság*, Dicsőszentmárton 1925, p. 351.

¹⁴ BÍRÓ, p. 28.

¹⁵ For the text, see I. SULYOK, *Végső veszedelemben középfokú oktatásunk II.*, in: *Magyar Kisebbség*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1923, pp. 283–285.

¹⁶ I. SULYOK, *A 6505. számú körrendelet*, in: *Magyar Kisebbség*, Vol. 2, No. 9, 1923, pp. 325–328.

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school laws also served the Romanian nationalist efforts. One after the other, kindergartens were opened to “*lead back minors to the ancient (i.e. Romanian) language*”.¹⁷ According to the law, “citizens of Romanian origin” could attend Romanian-language schools only, regardless of denomination. Neither the law, nor its directives of execution defined who is to decide what “of Romanian origin” means. “*As a consequence, every minority citizen in Romania was subjected to the practice that any state official: from the village scribe to the gendarmerie captain could, at a whim, declare his child as Romanian.*”¹⁸

In those days, data on the populace of Székelyföld were published, claiming that they are of 50% Romanian origin. Among other things, their re-Romanian-isation was the reason for the creation of the “*kultúrzóna*”, according to the 159th article of the new law on elementary schools.¹⁹ As of 1920, more than 750,000 Hungarians were living in this area.²⁰

The law on private education was the greatest blow to denominational education. The law did not recognize denominational schools, these were categorized among private schools. New institutions could be founded only with the preliminary permission and supervision of the minister of public education. Privately schooled students could not be admitted to private schools, the installment of parallel classes was subject to official authorization,

¹⁷ BÍRÓ, p. 28.

¹⁸ E. BARABÁS, *A magyar iskolák a román uralom alatt*, in: Magyar Szemle, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1928, p. 145.

¹⁹ In the territory of the “*kultúrzóna*”, Romanians with Transylvanian origins could not be employed as teachers, either, only those arriving from the Regate, for a higher salary. In addition, Romanian-language schools were opened wherever possible, to hinder the existing Hungarian institutions. Those who moved here from ‘Old-Romania’ received 10 hectares of land from the spare land reserve of the Romanian state. See BÍRÓ, pp. 28–29.

²⁰ A. AJTAI, *A kultúrzóna*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 3, No. 15–16, 1924, p. 617. It is not easy to assess the number of ethnicities and denominations in the period. For further details, see Á. KOVÁCS, *Erdély nemzetiségi statisztikája I.*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 14, No. 19–20, 1935, pp. 556–559; Á. KOVÁCS, *Erdély nemzetiségi statisztikája II.*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 14, No. 21, 1935, pp. 590–596; N. HEGEDŰS, *Megjegyzések Dr. Kovács Árpád fejtegetéseire*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 14, No. 22, 1935, pp. 614–616; I. JAKAFBAY, *Magyarázat Közép-Európa nemzetiségi térképéhez, 1942*, Budapest 1994, pp. 29–42; BARABÁS, p. 145.

just as the employment of instructors. They could not issue diplomas and all administrative work was to be in Romanian. They could not receive any support, aid or allowance without explicit permission from the state. The management theoretically had the rights to decide the language of education, but if children of Romanian parents also attended the school, then it could be Romanian only.²¹ (As mentioned above, the discernment of Romanian origin was not regulated by law, which allowed for abuses²²). In the institutions of monastic orders, Romanian became the exclusive language of education. Regardless of the language of education, national subjects could be taught only in the official language.²³ Those schools had public school rights that conformed to every criteria. If they possessed public school rights, then students could take the end-term exams in front of their own teachers. Without the public school rights, however, they had to take exams in front of mostly Romanian teachers from state schools, and extra fees were to be paid to these.²⁴

On March 7, 1925, another law of serious gravity passed. It was the law on matura-bacchalaureate, which was “a sort of disguised ‘*numerus clausus*’ toward the Hungarian high school students”, its goal being to stop Hungarian students from entering colleges beyond their numerical proportions.²⁵ There were two major exams that student had to take during their studies. The first was at the end of the fourth class, to enter the fifth. The exam included Romanian national subjects and Maths or French, with teachers of their own institution and an officially commissioned inspector, in Romanian language. The school-leaving matura exams took place at the end of the eighth year, in front of an exam committee of state school teachers, with the supervision of a university teacher. Apart from the national subjects, the exam included a modern language and two science subjects. The latter exams were in Hungarian, the rest had to be taken in Romanian.

²¹ BÍRÓ, p. 29.

²² BARABÁS, p. 145.

²³ SÚLYOK, *Végső veszedelemben középfokú oktatásunk III.*, p. 496.

²⁴ BÍRÓ, p. 33.

²⁵ BARABÁS, p. 149.

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Regulations of the law meant a great burden for teachers as well. Each instructor of the denominational schools had to pass an exam in Romanian language and the national subjects.²⁶ From those teachers who requested their resignation after the change of imperium, none received their due pensions. To address the situation, the Status created its own self-aiding funds.²⁷

Between 1926 and 1933, governments and the public attitude of the Roman majority stayed with the direction laid down by Angheliescu, and his successors did not really deviate from it even if they did not consider it suitable. There were mitigation attempts, especially in the case of language use, but the only thing they achieved was that teachers could make the exams easier at their discretion. Most of the time, this did not mean much good.²⁸

The third period of the Romanian minority education policy was from 1933 to 1938, bringing new and stricter resolutions. The “kultúrzóna” in Székelyföld was extended by ten years, the school-leaving exam became more difficult, native language use was completely abolished, teachers were ordered to take a new language exam, and the mini-abitur exam at the end of the fourth year was to be taken in front of a committee consisting of state school teachers. In this period, there was not one Hungarian denominational school that was granted public school rights.²⁹

The word “autonomy” was deleted from the text of the law of university education, though some modification bills retaining its essence did pass.³⁰

It was decreed that a Romanian-language state school was to be built in every village, the expenses of which also burdened the Roman Catholic citizens as well. Many denominational schools went bankrupt as the Hungarian population could not support and sustain two institutions. The conclave of high

²⁶ AZ ERDÉLYI KATHOLICIZMUS MÚLTJA ÉS JELENE, p. 350.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 353.

²⁸ BÍRÓ, pp. 30–31.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 34. About the educational institutions that had publicity right issues in 1928, see BALÁZS, p. 223.

³⁰ J. SÁNDOR, his speech at the March 9, 1932 session of the Senate, Prime Minister Iorga’s reply, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 11, 1932, p. 191.

school instructors, held in Temesvár on 17–19 April, 1936, went as far as they demanded the immediate and full abolishment of denominational education. *“It is absolutely necessary that the task of educating the future generations be entrusted only to Romanians [...] if the children of minorities want to live in Romania, their education must be done by Romanian teachers, in Romanian spirit and in Romanian language.”*³¹

After the 1937 fall of the liberal party, the next year, 1938, brought some changes. Due to the international situation, the strongly centralizing and Romanian-ising school policy became somewhat more temperate. From then on, the parents were to decide on the national identity of their children, and teachers of the denominational schools were to hold the entrance exams. However, the national subjects were still to be taught in Romanian, and they did not reclaim the right to hold the matura school-leaving exam.³² As a consequence of the softening situation, several schools received the public school rights and even some new schools were opened, though all of this did not alleviate the more serious difficulties.³³

The Struggle of Historical Churches for Denominational Education

The Romanian government used education as a tool of assimilation. Denominational schools were nurturing the two “features” that made the Hungarian minority so undesirable in the eyes of the Romanian political elite and, thus, of the rest of the population: that they were Roman Catholic and they were Hungarian.³⁴ The goal was a unified nation state, so they intended to Romanian-ise everyone who stood in the way.³⁵ The fact that Ghibu was aware of the dangers of forcing the official language is clear from how he

³¹ BÍRÓ, p. 31.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem, p. 34.

³⁴ B. JANCÓS, *A magyar egyházak helyzete a román uralom alatt*, in: Magyar Szemle, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1928, p. 62.

³⁵ A. BALÁZS, *Az erdélyi egyházak lépése Genfben*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1926, p. 95.

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opposed it during the Hungarian rule, when he feared for the continuity of his own minority.³⁶

Because of the educational unfairness toward them and thus the non-adherence to the Paris conventions, leaders of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic, Reformed, Unitarian and Evangelical churches edited a submission first to the League of Nations on May 6, 1926, then a memorandum on 12th of August, and requested protection for themselves, in accordance with the minority treaties. They asked for the creation and commission of an international committee. According to András Balázs, this did not happen. In his final conclusion, he declares that it did not bring about too much result either, perhaps as much as the Romanian state did not terminate everything for good.³⁷ As they found no legal support in Romania, the Status and the Reformed and Unitarian church districts complained at the League of Nations (the predecessor of the UN)³⁸ – the Romanian government’s reply was to defend themselves with the 1907 Apponyi-laws, but it falsified their text when communicating with Genf.³⁹

³⁶ K. GÁL, *Kétyelvűség a népiskolában és Dr. O. Ghibu tanár felfogása*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1925, pp. 132–133.

³⁷ BALÁZS, *Adatok az erdélyi*, pp. 221–222.

³⁸ BALÁZS, *Az erdélyi egyházak*, pp. 93–95. See also E. JAKABFFY, *Az erdélyi magyarság helyzete nemzetközi vonatkozásaiban*, in: Magyar Szemle, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1928, p. 168.

³⁹ This is how Angelescu referred to the law: “*If the Romanian schools accepted the state support, however little it was, they had been obliged to teach not only the history, geography and constitution, of Hungary, but also mathematics, general geography and history in Hungarian language.*” In addition, the government referred to one of Ghibu’s book, so they had to know the authentic legal text, since this is what Ghibu relates: “*The state supports denominational schools, if they adhere to the defined conditions, but in this case, the curriculum of five subjects (Hungarian language, history, geography, constitutional studies and mathematics) is decided by the state.*” With regard to the law, the Transylvanian Eastern Orthodox episcopate issued the following circular: “*Whether or not they are supported by state funds, in our denominational schools each subject must be taught exclusively in Romanian language, with the exception of the Hungarian language. There can be mathematical, historical, constitutional and geographical matters included in this course. Whatever is discussed in Hungarian should come after it was studied in the Romanian-language lessons of the respective subject. In the mathematical, historical, constitutional and geographical lessons there is only Romanian-language used.*” BARABÁS, pp. 146–147.

To return to the original debate, it must be noted that Duca, minister of foreign affairs offered to mediate at the negotiations between the minister of public education and the churches.

They summarized their standpoint in 13 points,⁴⁰ which served as the basis of the negotiations. As a reply, the ministry created a bill proposal of 19 points.⁴¹ The standpoints failed to converge sufficiently, so the negotiating parties signed the agreement only conditionally, but the Status, the Reformed and the Unitarians did not accept it anyway. Even so, the bill went under discussion on December 2 and included certain measures that basically countered those alleviations that the churches had achieved during the talks. However, the 19 points about these alleviations were sent to Genf. On December 11, the churches articulated their still valid concerns to the League of Nations.⁴²

This was not the first time when the international community was faced with the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania. International committees had come to the province in 1924 and 1927 as well⁴³ and they saw that there were problems with the enforcement of the minority treaty. The 1927 committee confirmed that the school reforms did not serve the interests of the minorities and their primary goal was to “*persecute the institutions by*

⁴⁰ The 13 point included the following main demands: the public school rights should not be rejected from schools that fulfill the legal requirements, monastic schools should be treated as the other denominational schools. With regard to pedagogy, the government should not interfere in the school management, any denominational school should be permitted to accept students with a different religion or private students, the language of teaching should be decided by the school management; providing a proper state support fund. Those believers who financially support denominational schools should not be obliged to pay for state school support; the seized school buildings should be given back or compensated for. See BALÁZS, *Az erdélyi egyházak*, pp. 96–97.

⁴¹ Some demands from the thirteen were acknowledged, but in a manner that stripped them of their essence. The more important ones, concerning language of education, state funds, and private students were not included, they were acknowledged only verbally. With regard to the school buildings and the financial support of state schools by denominational supporters, the minister claimed that the issues are outside of his authority and thus he did not comment on them. *Ibidem*, pp. 97–98.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 96–99.

⁴³ Among others, the representatives of the American Unitarians.

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official means⁴⁴ [...] to reject the public school rights, to impose the Romanian language, to restrain school autonomy [...] The 1925 laws constitute uncaring and nationalist political tools [...] Romanian language is not only compulsory but also completely dispossesses native language education [...] minorities are excluded from school supervision committees [...] it is a fixed idea of the Roman public education policy that they want to cram patriotism down the throats of reluctant millions.”⁴⁵

The subject matter of my paper does not include why the reports of these committees or the complaints to the League of Nations had no effect, but a significant element is to be noted, which is “*a severe blunder of every so-called ‘impartial’ work abroad that discusses the Hungarian minorities today*”.⁴⁶ Zsombor Szász and before him István Sulyok and Elemér Jakabffy already lamented about the fact that these discussions always draw a parallel between the Hungarian ethnic policy before the war and the Romanian one after the war.

To a differing extent, but both involved the matter of schools in the issue and the employed means are also similar, just like the demands of the respective minorities. Therefore, the comparison seems straightforward. Then again, just like in the case of ecclesiastic funds, one must not forget the changes in the legal-constitutional environment.

To quote Sulyok: “*what was once the wish and demand of the Romanian minority in Hungary, is now the right of the Hungarian minority in Romania, recognized by international treaties.*”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Sometimes in truly surprising forms. According to the newspaper article, the headmaster of the state school tricked the key from the instructor of the denominational school and then took the school building by force. After the report from the county prefect, the supervisor contacted the involved parties but there was no relevant action taken to give the school building back. See *Ilyen iskola foglалásra még nem volt példa! – A „Keleti Újság” 250-ik számából*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 13, No. 21, 1934, pp. 640–642.

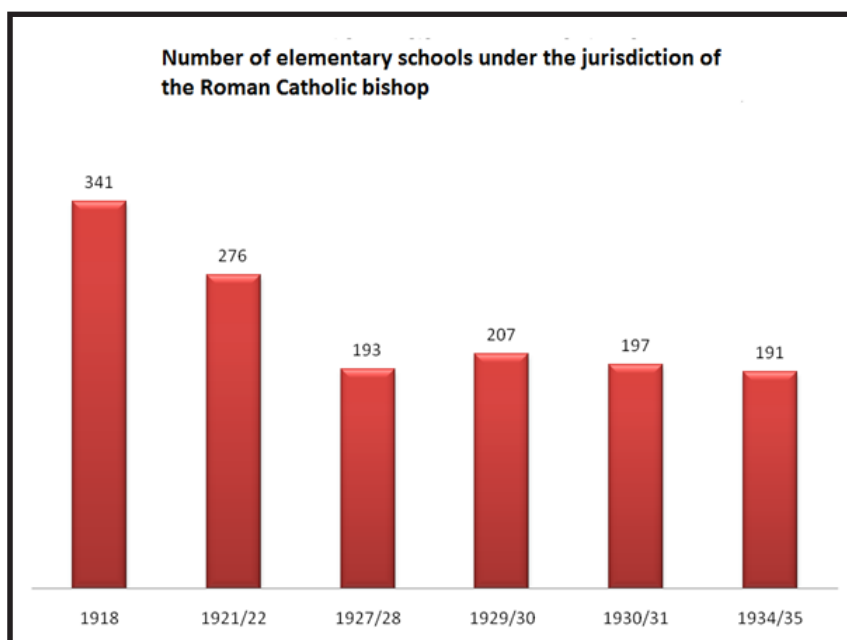
⁴⁵ Zs. SZÁSZ, *A vallási kisebbségek jogai – Egy amerikai bizottság jelentése a romániai kisebbség helyzetéről*, in: Magyar Szemle, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1928, pp. 65–66.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

⁴⁷ I. SULLYOK, *A 6505. számú körrendelethez*, in: Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 2, No. 9, 1923, p. 324.

Evaluation and Summary

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, there were 2,331 Romanian-language denominational schools, operating with the financial support of the Hungarian state.⁴⁸ Their role on the formation of the Romanian intelligentsia and thus on the development of the patriotic identity is an undisputable fact.



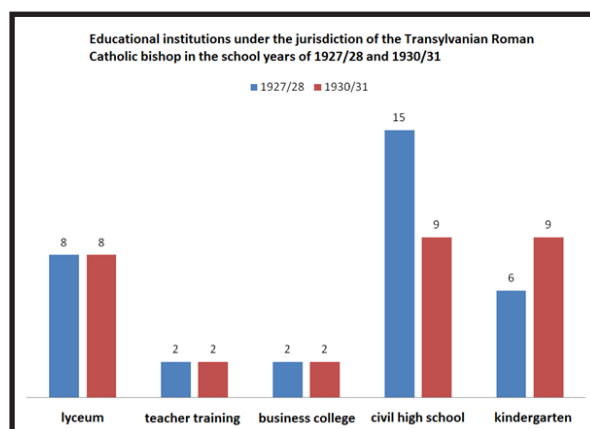
After the change of imperium, the number of denominational schools started to decrease. At first at a slower rate, because during its two years of functioning, the governing council wanted to address the issue of minority education through the denominational schools. They also authorized the opening of new institutions, in accordance with the former Hungarian laws. Then in 1922 the first Anghelescu-government launched the program of dispossessing the denominational schools. As a result, by the end of the 20's, their number had almost halved, compared to 1918. There was a slight increase in the school year of 1929/30, but then the decline continued.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ I. KOSHUTÁNY, *A római katolikus egyház Erdélyben*, Cluj 1924, p. 8.

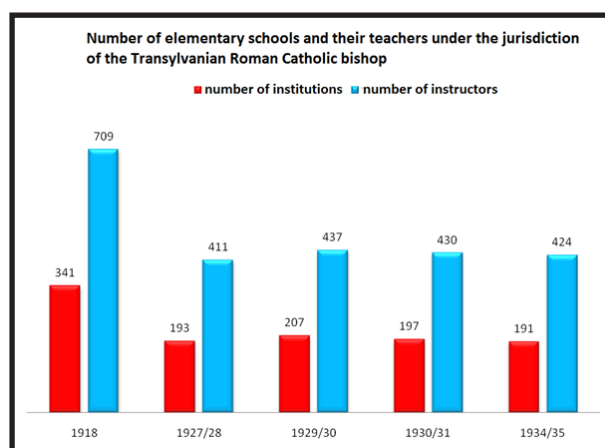
⁴⁹ BÍRÓ, p. 27.

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Not only were primary schools affected by the changes. At the most active period of the disadvantageous educational policy, there were only two teacher training colleges, two business/trade colleges and eight lyceums operating in Transylvania under the supervision of the Roman Catholic episcopate. In addition, while the number of kindergartens grew by a half, the number of civil secondary schools continued to decline, by around 40% by the early 30's.



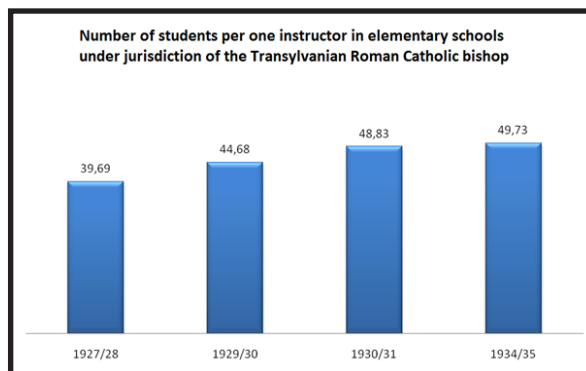
Decrees were made in the effort of dispossessing the denominational schools. The financial funding was taken away,⁵⁰ the state support denied⁵¹ and the

⁵⁰ SCHEFFLER, p. 300.

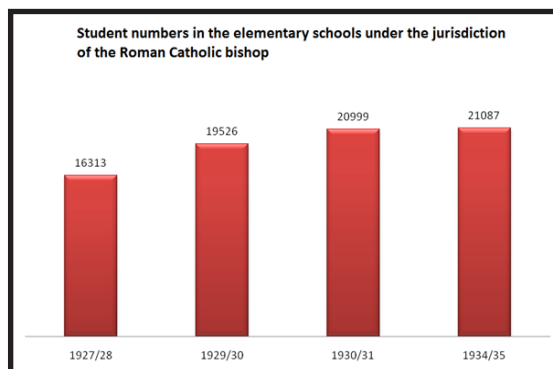
⁵¹ SULYOK, *Végső veszedelemben középfokú oktatásunk III.*, p. 497, BÍRÓ, p. 33.

public school rights rejected.⁵² As a result of this all, the number of students dwindled to around the 60% of the 1918 number.

Due to the severe burdens on the instructors, the compulsory exams, the closing of schools and the scarce financial resources, their numbers were also declining. The 1925 law on private schools ordered the ministerial permit necessary for employing new teachers,⁵³ and those still working had to take newer exams from time to time, which cost much money and effort.⁵⁴



Despite the difficulties, there was an increase of denominational school students in the 30's. But the increase in the teacher count was not proportional with the tendency, thus the ratio of students per one teacher was growing. This could endanger the quality of education on the long run.



⁵² Ibidem, p. 34.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 31.

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The education policy of the Romanian government contradicted three agreements and its own official promises: the resolutions of the Alba Iulia conference, those of the Paris conventions and the canons of the Corpus Iuris Canonici (1372–1382).

The 1st 2nd and 4th articles of the IIIrd section of the Roman national conference in Alba Iulia declared the followings: “1. *Complete national freedom for the cohabiting nationalities. Every nation has the right for education and governance in their own native language, their own administration conducted by individuals of their own.* 2. *Equal rights and complete autonomous denominational freedom for all denominations within the state* 4. *Unrestricted freedom of press, association and assembly; the free propagation of every human idea.*”⁵⁵

When in December 9, 1919, the allied powers and Romania made an agreement on the issue of minorities, some hope flickered for the Transylvanians – this treaty could have improved the situation of the churches seceded from Hungary. “*Every Romanian citizen, regardless of differences in race, language or religion, is equal before the law and enjoys the same civil and political rights. No religious, faith-related or denominational difference can be disadvantageous for any Romanian citizen, concerning the enjoyment of civil or political rights, namely: the gaining of public positions, offices and honours, or the practice of trades.*”⁵⁶ – as the document says. Article 9 states that minorities “*have the right to establish, manage and supervise, at their own expense, institutions of charity, religion or of social nature, in addition to schools and other institutions of education; in accordance with their right to freely use their own language and freely practice their religion*”.⁵⁷ According to the tenth article, “*in those towns and districts where there is a significant*

⁵⁵Magyar Kisebbség, Vol. 1, No. 7, 1922, december 1. <http://www.jakabffy.ro/magyarkisebbsseg/index.php?action=cimek&lappid=2&cikk=m950206.html>.

⁵⁶<http://www.jakabffy.ro/magyarkisebbsseg/index.php?action=cimek&lappid=1&cikk=m950115.html>.

⁵⁷ SÜLYÖK, *Végső veszedelemben középfokú oktatásunk III.*, p. 496.

*proportion of Romanian citizens belonging to a racial, religious or linguistic minority, these minorities shall be provided a fair fraction from all those funds of public resources that are spent, in the town or other budget, on purposes of education, religion or charity”.*⁵⁸ These articles were deliberately ignored by the Romanian administration.

As we have seen, the two referenced documents had promised full religious freedom and internal autonomy for every church, including the Roman Catholic Church. The international treaties and the Alba Iulia decrees could have guaranteed the minorities’ right to manage their schools, but as they were never authorized by law, their legal binding power and quality are seriously dubious.⁵⁹

It must be noted that the first never entered the text of law (except for the first article) and even though the latter entered the Romanian corpus iuris in 1920, it was never actually used.

The primary goal of the education policy of the Romanian governments was that as many children should attend the state schools as possible, thus receiving an education that makes them faithful subjects of the country, instead of an education that maintains and nurtures Hungarian sentiments and the Roman Catholic faith.⁶⁰ To achieve this goal, they usurped the parents’ right to declare ethnic identity and impeded the possibility to attend denominational schools.⁶¹ The parents, however, insisted that their children receive appropriate religious education and be able to follow their traditions as much as possible, even taking on financial burdens for denominational schools and the number of pupils in the elementary schools managed by the episcopate began to rise steadily in the 30’s.

⁵⁸ AZ ERDÉLYI KATHOLICIZMUS MULTJA ÉS JELENE, p. 333.

⁵⁹ A román alkotmány és törvénykezés kisebbségi szerződésekhöz és a gyulafehérvári határozatokhoz fűződő viszonyát lásd bővebben: About the Romanian constitution’s and legislature’s relations to the Alba Iulia decrees, see: L. NAGY, *A kisebbségek alkotmányjogi helyzete Nagyromániában*, Kolozsvár 1944. Only the first point of the Alba Iulia decrees entered the law on territorial unification, the rest never took legal effect.

⁶⁰ BÍRÓ, p. 31.

⁶¹ BARABÁS, p. 145.

Csaba Máté Sarnyai

“We do not want Foreign Strongholds within Our National State” – the Romanian Educational Policy and the Historically Established Churches between the Two World Wars

The political elite failed to completely achieve its real goals, because the *“churches fought with a heroic effort to retain their self-management and the denominational school network was the most extensive institution system of the Hungarians, up until the Communist expropriations”*.⁶²

Abstract

Within its territory, which had been extended by the peace treaties following WW1, Romania intended to create a nation-state that is also religiously uniform. Therefore, minorities in Transylvania meant a twofold problem, as they were both Hungarians and Roman Catholics.

Just as Romanians had the denominational schools as fountainheads of national/ethnic awakening during Hungarian authority, now these schools served the safekeeping of the Hungarian national sentiment. This is why governments strived to suppress them as much as possible, even if they were obliged by international treaties to protect them. With regard to governmental actions and public attitude, four periods can be distinguished. In our paper, we aim at monitoring and evaluating the process in an analytic manner.

Keywords

Hungarian Ethnic Minorities; Transylvania; Roman Catholic Schools

⁶² A. JAKAB, *Vergődésben. Magyar kisebbségek “történelmi” egyházai az átalakuló Európában, (Problématár)*, Budapest 2009, p. 60.