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## **The Helvetian model as an alternative and its failure in autumn 1918**

### **A contribution to the history of the minority policy of the Károlyi government**

#### **Abstract**

*The minority political idea of Oszkár Jászi elaborated at the end of World War I., that Hungary should have had to join forces with the newly formed states, was doomed to failure from start. It could not succeed because of the actual way the great powers delineated the forms of the new Central European states. Hungary became internationally isolated and the minority movements grew more and more radical.*

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy lost World War I. which led to its dissolution. The long process leading to its breaking up into several national states has usually been neglected by analysts who prefer to interpret the real reasons of the dramatic changes in Central Europe from the point of view of their own national interests. They treat the new situation created by the armistice in Padova and Belgrade as being without historical antecedent, the creation of small national states merely as geopolitical and geo-strategic rearrangements serving the strategies of the victorious great powers. There are tragic myths about the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and heroic ones on the foundation of new states; however, these are partial, nationalistic interpretations. In these contexts the protagonists of the era can appear as state forming heroes, national saviours or traitors destroying their own country.

The analysis offered by Gyula Szekfű of the event of 1918 has remained dominant. In his book published in 1920 he wrote that the responsibility for the catastrophe rested on those who had deliberately prepared it, who, shoving Prime Minister Tisza aside, took the leading of the country into their own hands and instead of steering the country

into a safe haven, sank it in the vortex of revolution.<sup>1</sup> Eighty-eight years later János Gyurgyák has drawn the same conclusions in his book on the history of national idea and nationalism, that it was political naiveté on the part of the radicals to believe that the Hungarian nation and the minorities living in Hungary would have understood each other without violating integrity; the Hungarian political elite could not have renounced territorial integrity willingly, it was an impossible thought at the time and even to suggest such a step would have meant political suicide.<sup>2</sup> Gyurgyák is of the opinion that the mistakes of the radicals and their leader, Oszkár Jászi originated from three factors: first of all they treated the traditional political elite of noble dissent rather exclusively and this way eliminated the possibility of a dialogue. Secondly they were too strictly attached to the integrity of the country when they tried to come to agreement with the minorities, that *ipso facto* was impossible. The third factor was that the democratic transformation and the Hungarian national interests were in 'tragic conflict' and neither Tisza, nor Jászi were of the necessary political format to solve the problem. Gyurgyák's conclusion, similar to that of Szekfű, is gravely condemning, that Jászi and his followers misunderstood the state of affairs, they did not recognize the real causes of the tragic circumstances, the underdevelopment of the country.<sup>3</sup> The above arguments, however, seem to be too limited and one-sided a summary of the mistakes committed by the protagonist of the 1918 collapse and mastermind of the failed minority policy. After all Jászi searched for possible allies – and partially found them among the independents and the nationalities too – when he tied to solve the question of the extension of suffrage as well as that of the correction of the Hungarian nationalistic minority-policy course. He cannot be blamed for Tisza being neglectful and a fatalist; similarly to ignore the provisory policy of the Károlyi government, expressly declared

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<sup>1</sup> Szekfű Gyula: A három nemzedék és ami utána következik (új kiadás), Budapest, 1989. 373. [The three generations and what follows]

<sup>2</sup> Gyurgyák János: Ezzé lett magyar hazátok. A magyar nemzeteszem és nacionalizmus története. Osiris Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2008. 176. [That is what your Hungarian country has become. The history of the Hungarian idea of nationhood and nationalism]

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

to be valid till the peace-conference, means to misunderstand the policy of integrity of the Károlyi government.<sup>4</sup>

The accusations concerning the Károlyi government have not been justified by the historical analysis of Szekfű; the arguments explaining the country's collapse seem to look for scapegoats and do not reflect the actual aims and shortcomings of the Hungarian nationality policy after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise.

Tisza himself had condemned the nationality policy following 1867 which led to a dead-end and propagated forceful assimilation; though he, too, was responsible for the rejection of general suffrage, stopping nationality developments toward autonomy which pushed the minorities of the country toward external solutions for their aspirations for national emancipation during the years leading to WW1, thus jeopardizing Hungary's integrity. Jászi and Károlyi could not be held responsible for all of it. Jászi in his memoirs written in his Viennese emigration tried to lighten his own role. Less than two years after the Hungarian October revolution of 1918 he was of the opinion that Hungary's integrity had been irrevocably lost and the secession of the nationalities could not have been stopped.<sup>5</sup>

It would be impossible to point out anyone as the planner of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy because everybody from the monarch to the Hungarian governments and their opposition wanted to preserve the integrity of Hungary up to the days of the defeat at WW1. The real drama of the situation at the end of the 1918, described as a maze by Szekfű, was that there was no stable internal or external basis to depend on. The October 1918 revolution was only a small event of the European turmoil effecting all the participants of the war. The communist takeover in March 1919 is a different question where Károlyi's personal relative responsibility could indeed be an issue.

There are two questions to be asked when analysing the possibilities of a democratic change in the Hungarian nationality policy. One

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<sup>4</sup> Szarka László: A Jászi Oszkár vezette nemzetiségi minisztérium rendezési tervei és működése 1918 végén, In: Göncz L. (szerk.): A Mura mente és a trianoni békeszerződés - Pokrajina ob Muri in trianonska mirovna pogodba. Lendvai Füzetek, 2000. 154-163.

<sup>5</sup> Jászi Oszkár: Magyar kálvária magyar föltámadás. A két forradalom értelme, jelentősége és tanulságai. Magyar Október Szabadsajtó, Budapest, 1984 (3. kiadás). 69-70. [Hungarian calvary and resurrection. The meaning of the two revolutions]

is why did Oszkár Jászi, the minister of nationalities of the Károlyi government believe that adopting the elements of the Helvetian model would have given a new basis to the Hungarian nationality relations? The other is how did he plan and for what goals did he try to organize the cantons, an ethnic based federation of Hungary and how would he have made it accepted during the Hungarian-Romanian negotiations in Arad and the November 1918 Hungarian-Slovak ones in Budapest, and realized it in the Ruthen, German and Slovak nationality laws?<sup>6</sup>

As the minister of the Károlyi government Jászi laid out the theoretical basis of his nationality policy in his book *A Monarchia jövője. A dualizmus bukása, a Dunai Egyesült Államok* [The future of the Monarchy. The downfall of dualism, the Danubian united states] the second edition of which appeared before the outbreak of the revolution in October 1918. Albeit there constantly remains a false accusation in Hungarian as well as international literature that Jászi had not considered a federation of the ethnic nationalities of Hungary, Chapter 9 of the book subtitled *Magyarország és a demokratikus föderalizmus* [Hungary and the democratic federalism] gave a detailed analysis of the advantages and pitfalls of federative change. He definitely supported the system of national autonomies and the democratic federation of Hungary. Contradicting the argument that the system of democratic federation would have overthrown Hungarian domination and would have supported the expansion of the nationalities, Jászi declared that a democratic Hungarian nationality policy could not aim at the continuation of Tisza's obsession about keeping Hungarian hegemony by every possible means as that had been an unacceptable basis for negotiations for the non-Hungarians representing half of the population of the Hungarian Kingdom since 1848.

<sup>6</sup> Recent contributions to the topic: K. Lengyel Zsolt: „Keleti Svájcz” és Erdély 1918–1919. A nagyromán állameszme magyar alternatíváinak történetéhez. In: Uő: A kompromisszum keresése. Tanulmányok a 20. századi transzilvanizmus korai történetéhez. Pro Print Könyvkiadó, Csíkszereda, 2007; Zeidler Miklós (szerk.): Trianon. Osiris 2003; Salamon Konrád: Nemzeti önpusztítás 1918–1920. Forradalom – proletárdiktatúra – ellenforradalom. Korona Kiadó, Budapest, 2001; Litván György: Jászi Oszkár. Osiris, Budapest, 2003; Pelle János: Jászi Oszkár. Életrajzi, eszme- és kortörténeti esszé. XX. Század Intézet, Budapest, 2001; Hronský, Marián: Boj o Slovensko a Trianon 1918–1920. Národné literárne centrum, Bratislava, 1998; Grad, Cornel – Ciubota, Viroel (ed.): Sfarsit si inceut de epoca. Korszakvég – korszakkezdet. The End and the Beginning of an Era. Lektorn, Zalau, 1998.

This aspect of Jászi's nationality policy has never been argued; albeit it would be important to compare the Hungarian nationality policy before 1918 with the concept of the Károlyi government, and analyse both in the context of the radicalisation of the nationalities and understand the innovations of the former: that it stated that the federal transformation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was only possible through the complete democratisation of all its members and first of all of that of Hungary.<sup>7</sup>

The Károlyi Government defined its aims in several steps to achieve by its nationality policy: the first and foremost step was to introduce general suffrage together with extending minority-nationality rights; the second phase would have created regional non-Hungarian 'national' governments modelled on the Swiss canton system in the areas with non-Hungarian majority. The idea of 'Eastern Switzerland' was meant to balance the national aspirations of the neighbouring countries, which expressed enormous territorial claims that were accepted by the great powers and were supported at the peace conference too, and agree with them in territorial and other questions and preserve the regions with Hungarian majority in spite of military occupations.<sup>8</sup>

The proclamation to the nationalities of Hungary signed by the Minister President published in the newspapers on the 24. November 1918 asked the nationalities to make peace with Hungary because it was a new democratic country where every one had the same rights; to cooperate, work and learn together so that Czechland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Hungary could be like one country.<sup>9</sup>

It is true, Jászi's new nationality concept had hardly any chance at the time when the great powers had already formed new states in Central Europe, when Hungary was almost completely isolated internationally, constantly threatened with military intervention and the nationality movements increasingly radical. It is also certain that the national affiliation of the Ruthens, Saxons and Swabian, who temporarily seemed to be ready for agreement, did not depend on the endeavours of the Hungarian government, but was dictated by the

<sup>7</sup> Jászi Oszkár: *A Monarchia jövője. A dualizmus bukása, a Dunai Egyesült Államok*, Budapest, 1918. 124. [The future of the Monarchy. The failure of dualism, the Danubian United States].

<sup>8</sup> Jászi Oszkár: *Magyar kálvária*. P. 70. [ungarian Calvary]

<sup>9</sup> *Világ*, 1918. október 24. Newly published in Zeidler, Miklós (ed.): *Trianon*. p. 37.

military occupations of the neighbouring countries and the decision of the peace conference.

### The drafts of the Helvetian Model

#### *The Hungarian – Romanian negotiations in Arad*

The first challenge for the Károlyi Government, one which defined its later nationality policy, came on the 9. November. After the promising 3<sup>rd</sup> of November Hungarian – Romanian negotiations, the Romanian National Council (RNC), in full knowledge of the American support of their claims, sent an ultimatum to the Hungarian government. The RNC announced that they wanted to seize the power over vast regions of Transylvania and eastern Hungary with Romanian inhabitants justified by the acceleration of the events, by the right for self-determination of the people as well as by the necessity to stop assaults over properties.<sup>10</sup>

The 12. November 1918 meeting of the Hungarian government decided to delegate Jászi, the minister of Nationality Matters to go to the head quarters of RNC in Arad and try to agree upon provisional arrangements till the decisions of the peace conference concerning the situation in Transylvania and the eastern part of Hungary;<sup>11</sup> a kind of *modus vivendi* was to settle based on the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination, not merely agreeing with the self-determination of the Romanian nation, but also vindicating the same rights for the other nationalities, Hungarians, Germans, Saxons etc. too.<sup>12</sup>

Jászi firmly rejected the claims of the RNC over regions without Romanian majority as that would disagree with the Wilsonian princi-

<sup>10</sup> A Román Nemzeti Tanács memoranduma a kormányhatalom átadásáról 26 vármegye területén 1918. nov. 9. Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) K-40-1918-3-IX-240. [the memorandum of the RNC on the take over of governmental power in 26 counties] [Hungarian National Archives].

<sup>11</sup> Jászi Oszkár: Visszaemlékezés a Román Nemzeti Komitéval folytatott aradi tárgyalásaimra. Különnyomat a Napkelet. December 1921., Cluj–Kolozsvár, 1921 [Memoirs of the negotiations with the RNC in Arad]. [Offprint]; K. Lengyel, Zsolt: „Keleti Svájc”, op.cit.pp. 73–77. Raffay Ernő: Erdély 1918–1919-ben. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1987.pp. 92–114 [Transylvania 1918-1919]. Haslinger, Peter: Arad November 1918. Oszkár Jászi und die Rumänen in Ungarn 1900 bis 1918. Wien, 1993. 122–135. Szarka, László: Iratok a az 1918. novemberi aradi magyar–román tárgyalások történetéhez. Regio, 1994. 3. 140–166. [Documents of the November 1918 Hungarian – Romanian negotiation in Arad]

<sup>12</sup> Jászi, Oszkár. Világ, 14. November 1918.pp. 2-3. speech given on the first day of the Hungarian-Romanian negotiations.

ple.<sup>13</sup> The minister of the Károlyi government could accept the claims only over regions with Romanian majority, and demanded the extension of the principle of majority and the right of self-determination to all the nationalities of the country, Hungarians included.<sup>14</sup>

Jászi's first draft for solutions was based on the model of the governmental system of Switzerland as a starting point, with nationality governments for local matters and in cooperation with the central government in the case of common affairs.

The Swiss model would have been realized by dividing Transylvania and eastern Hungary into cantons. Jászi proposed the abolition of the old counties, the creation of smaller units with more homogenous national population to deal with the affairs of common interest. He claimed that it would be no good to create new oppression to replace the old one, what the preservation of the old county system would mean.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time Jászi pointed out that due to the mosaic-like character of Transylvania even the suggested division based on nationality would still produce cantons with considerable minorities whose rights should have been ensured by a reciprocal system of minority protection. Jászi claimed the plan to be the only possible realization of the Wilsonian principles considering the conditions of Transylvania and eastern Hungary. He assumed mutual agreement and was of the opinion that the rejection of the plan would actually mean the rejection of the Wilsonian principles.

Two days after the Belgrade armistice negotiations Jászi felt compelled to point out the dangers of military actions expected by RNC, that the peace to come did not depend on Foch and the other generals who, as it had become obvious at the peace talks, did not differ from the Hapsburgs or Ludendorffs, but it would be made by the European Soviet republic, by councils of workers and soldiers; that the promises of the great powers made to Czech and

other imperialists would not be recognized by the European republic. He referred to Racovszkij, who was appointed ambassador of the Hungary in the Russian Soviet Republic, as one who was well informed about Romania and the situation of Romanians in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Jászi was later seriously reprimanded for his statement, and even nowadays there are some who accuse him to have prepared communism – together with Károlyi, an accusation most unjust.

Recognising the aims of the Romanian objections made the previous day, Jászi replaced the original plan of separating the areas of eastern Hungary and Transylvania inhabited by Romanians from the Hungarian state into cantons – as contradicting the Wilsonian principle of self determination – by a more far-reaching one. He stressed that the creation of new states, however in line with the general direction of European developments, would remain the competence of the international peace conference.

Under the circumstances Jászi rejected both the plan for a separate Romanian state in Transylvania and its annexation to the Romanian Kingdom; the former because he was convinced that Transylvania torn away from Hungary would result in a ‘deformed state incapable of survive~, the latter because in his opinion Romania was the ‘most corrupted, most feudalistic state’ in contemporary Europe, and the Hungarian, German and Serb minorities must not have been thrown on its mercy. After the Romanian refusal he summed up the situation, that he and Maniu had different thoughts about the self-determination of nations, in Jászi’s plans it mean a Hungarian Switzerland, in Maniu’s a tightly organized Romanian nationalistic empire.

The head of the Hungarian delegation then presented a new plan summed up in 11 items about the transitional government with the task of the preservation of peace and public order. As a part of it RNC would have the right to take the administration of districts and towns with Romanian majority into Romanian hands; to participate in the Hungarian government through a delegate of the Romanian government to handle all the international, economic, financial matters, as well as those of public provision and transport of the Romanian governmental areas.

In the Romanian governmental areas new laws could have been formed only by the consent of the Romanian government. The 44.1868 nationality law would have regulated the rights of the Romanian minorities in Transylvania and eastern Hungary, as well as in recip-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

rolocation those of the minority Hungarians in areas with Romanian majority. It also required of the RNC, while guaranteeing the security of property, they would renounce of falling back on the military force of the Romanian Kingdom.

The plan also suggested the appointment of a common governmental commission for the creation of a new Transylvanian governmental system as well as for the decisions over controversial issues. This system would have been in power till the end of the peace negotiations and would have no role in its decision-making. The Transylvanian provision would have operated under the scrutiny of sophisticated nations and the protection of the national honour of the two nations, Hungary and Romania.

Maniu stressed the unrestricted right of self-determination of the Romanian nations and announced its right to declare complete secession, the Romanian nation being an independent nation intended to hold the executive power in its own hands. After the evening interval the negotiations ended with the reading out of the negative resolution of the RNC in Arad.

### **Hungarian – Slovak negotiations in Budapest**

After the complete fiasco of the Arad meeting the Károlyi government tried to achieve results by further negotiations concerning the Slovak and Ruthen regions of northern Hungary, especially that the Belgrade agreement left greater freedom of action at least temporarily and theoretically. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November Jászi sent a letter to Matúš Dula and some other Slovak politicians to form personal relationship with the leaders of the Slovak National Council (SNC).<sup>17</sup>

Since the French military entente mission led by lieutenant-colonel Vix seemed to keep minutely to the text of the Belgrade cease-fire of 13. November and accepted the phrase about allowing Hungarian administration in the northern part of Hungary, the Czechoslovakian government delegated Milan Hodža, Slovakian politician to discuss the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian questions of 'delimitation and liquidation' Hodža initiated negotiations with the Károlyi government in

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<sup>17</sup> OL, K-40, 1918–IX. 3. c s. 2/1918

Budapest on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November.<sup>18</sup> Károlyi and Jászi received Hodža and informed him of the offer of giving governmental power to the SNC in 26 districts with Slovak majority.<sup>19</sup> The towns of Kassa, Pozsony, Érsekújvár and the districts of Verebély, Rozsnyó, Gölnichánya, Kassa and Sztropkó would have been excluded.<sup>20</sup>

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November Hodža invited Matúš Dula and a 6 strong delegation of SNC to Budapest to discuss the plans of the Hungarian government; doing so Hodža evidently transgressed his originally limited mandate, and he tried to excuse himself toward Prague that he had tried to gain time till lieutenant-colonel Vix ascertained the validity of item 17. of the Belgrade convention and clarified its meaning regarding the Slovakian territories promised to Czechoslovakia.<sup>21</sup> The Slovak delegation was unanimous that they would not accept the autonomy offered by Jászi under any circumstances without first consulting the Czech government.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of November the Hungarian – Slovakian negotiations followed the scenario of the earlier ones in Arad. Hodža made it clear from the beginning and later repeated in the Hungarian media that the topic of the negotiations could only relate to transitory agreements and not touch upon the self determination of the Slovak people who had already considered themselves Czechoslovakian citizens since 14. August 1918 (the date France recognized the Czechoslovakian government in emigration). Matúš Dula the head of the SNC delegation made similar declarations. Hodža wanted to gain time till the Czechoslovakian legion would arrive from Italy and in opposition to Jászi's plans made evident that the question of the Slovakian autonomy could only be feasible within the frame of the Czechoslo-

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<sup>18</sup> Hodža, Milan: *Slovenský rozchod s Maďarmi*, 1929; Fogarassy László: *Hodža Milán és a Károlyi-kormány, Palócföld*, 1990. 5. 72–88 [H.M. and the Károlyi government]; Krajčovič, Milan: *Károlyiho vláda v Maďarsku a jej vzťah k Slovensku*, In: Deák, Ladislav (red.): *Slovensko a Maďarsko v rokoch 1918-1920 (Zborník referátov z konferencie v Michalovciach 14.-15.6.1994.) Matica slovenská*, Martin, 1995 s. 32-45; Krajčovičová, Natália: *Koncepcia autonómie Slovenska v maďarskej politike v rokoch 1918-1920*, Uo. s. 46-55; Hronský, Marián: *Boj o Slovensko*, id. m. 114–124; Szarka László: *Szlovák nemzeti fejlődés – magyar nemzetiségi politika 1867–1918*. Kalligram Könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 1995. 216–221 [Slovakian national development – Hungarian nationality policy].

<sup>19</sup> Fogarassy László op.cit. pp. 83-84.

<sup>20</sup> For the map see Szarka op.cit. 260–261.

<sup>21</sup> Hronský, Marián: *Boj o Slovensko*, id. m. 115-116.

vakian state, the negotiations with the Hungarian government were solely about military and economic liquidation.<sup>22</sup>

Though Jászi and the Hungarian government believed to have got farther in the negotiations with Hodža and the SNC delegation than with RNC in Arad, the end result was the same: the Czechoslovak government in Prague supervised the Budapest talks, repudiated Hodža, and Dula rejected Jászi's plan in the name of the SNC. It was not enough anymore to offer Slovak governmental authority restricted to regions with at least fifty percent Slovak inhabitants just as a restricted autonomy was found unacceptable. Jászi's plan was also rejected by his own colleagues in the cabinet, thus he remained in minority.<sup>23</sup>

The only result of the Hungarian – Slovak negotiations was the agreement over the demarcation lines signed by Albert Bartha minister of war and Milan Hodža; the Hungarian government committed themselves to withdraw the Hungarian armed forces to the line more or less corresponding to the Hungarian – Slovak language limit. This demarcation line, however, was not accepted either by the French army commandant in the Balkans or by the French minister of foreign affairs who considered it invalid, so much so that Eduard Beneš Czechoslovakian foreign minister, staying continuously in Paris, managed to obtain a French document which defined the rivers Danube – Ipoly as the demarcation line between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in November.<sup>24</sup>

### **The two plans of the Hungarian cantons**

Neither with Romania nor with Czechoslovakia were the negotiations successful. There were various plans and suggestions pouring in the department dealing with legal matters in Jászi's ministry led by Bódog Somló, in addition to Jászi's own modifications and supplements. The plan of cantons for the entire territory of Hungary was completed by the end of November. The archives of the Ministry of Nationalities contain a variant shelved on the 2. December 1918,

<sup>22</sup> Fogarassy László op.cit. pp. 76-84

<sup>23</sup> OL, K-27, Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek, 1918. november 28-29, december 1. [cabinet minutes

<sup>24</sup> Hodža, Milan: Rozchod, id. m. 64-75; Fogarassy László: Hodža Milán, id. m. 83-86.

which tried to systematize the Helvetian model planned for the whole country.<sup>25</sup>

According to the above-mentioned document Hungary should have been divided into districts – or cantons. Of the 14 districts/cantons seven would have been Hungarian: Pozsony, Marosvásárhely (or Kolozsvár), Szeged, Debrecen, Budapest, Győr and Pécs. Of the other seven one Slovak, formed out of the north western and northern counties and the eastern Slovak counties with Kassa as its centre; one Ruthen around Beregszász; the cantons of Dées and Déva Romanian; one German in the Nagyszeben area; while the one of Temesvár was planned as a canton with mixed Saxon, Serbian, Bunyevac, Hungarian population.<sup>26</sup> Miksa Stróbl who did not belong to the staff of Jászi's ministry prepared an even more complex plan of cantonization. He published an article with the title “The new Hungary as eastern Switzerland” in the 1918 Christmas issue of *Új Magyarország* with a map showing 12 nationality cantons, eight Hungarian ones and six additional ones for big cities Pozsony, Kassa, Debrecen, Budapest, Szeged and Kolozsvár.<sup>27</sup> However, none of the plans had any political meaning by the end of 1918.

### Nationality laws

In the meantime preparations for the Ruthen, German Slovak nationality laws were in progress, which would have had the role of codification of the planned regional autonomies. The canton system of Switzerland had been taken as models for the ethno-regional self-governments that carry all the regional decisions within their own competence and deal with national matters in cooperation with the central government.

<sup>25</sup> Published by Szarka László: Keleti Svájc – illúzió vagy utópia? In: -: Duna-táji dilemmák. Nemzeti kisebbségek – kisebbségi politika a 20. századi Kelet-Közép-Európában, Ister, Budapest, 1998. pp. 113–125. [Easter Switzerlan – illusion or utopia?] [Dilemmas of the Danube area. National minorities – minority politics] For the processed map cf. Bárdi Nándor – Fedinec Csilla – Szarka László: Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a 20. században [Hungarian minority communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century]. Gondolat Kiadó – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Budapest, 2008. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Szarka: Duna-táji dilemmák pp.281–284. [Dilemmas of the Danube area.]

<sup>27</sup> Pándi Lajos (ed.): Köztes Európa 1763–1993. Térképgyűjtemény. Osiris–Századvég, Budapest, 1995. 290–291.[Europe in between. 1763–1993. Collection of maps]

As the result of the assiduous organisation and preparation there was a Ruthen meeting in Budapest on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 with the assistance of Hungarophil Ruthen leaders, Ágoston Volosin, Hiador Sztripszky, Ágost Stefán and Oreszt Szabó. On the 23<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 the Nationality Law No. X.1918 on Russka-Krajna was accepted and the creation of Russka-Krajna ministry, autonomous administration and the Ruthen general assembly began. Similar self-governing structures were planned by the nationality laws 1918. VI. for the German and 1918. XXX. for the Slovak (Slovenska krajina) self-governments.<sup>28</sup>

Because the Hungarian nationalist opposition condemned the plans and the neighbouring countries threatened with military occupation, Jászi found his position increasingly hopeless. He had already offered twice his resignation but Károlyi never accepted it. He tried to approach the heads of the neighbouring countries already becoming increasingly hostile, but it was only Masaryk president of Czechoslovakia he felt he could hope for some response. He would have liked Masaryk to forget old disagreements and look upon Hungary as a new democracy, a nation that freed itself from its wicked lords and stepped onto the road of democracy with dynamism and determination.<sup>29</sup>

Under optimal circumstances the idea of constitutional law slowly taking shape in Jászi's Ministry of Nationalities could have developed toward the plans of a complex symmetrical federative state. In this framework there were three nationalities with national laws two of which – Romanian and Slovak – would have been ensured of regional autonomy. Under ideal circumstances the 'empires' i.e. regional governments as offered during the negotiations would have become federative parts of the Hungarian Republic according to Jászi's plan. However, the plan had no future; the war was lost, there was no internal or international support for the plan, while the threatening

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<sup>28</sup> Schönwald Pál: A magyarországi 1918-1919-es polgári demokratikus forradalom állam- és jogtörténeti kérdései. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1969. 64–87. [The governmental and legal questions of the Hungarian bourgeois-democratic revolution in 1918-1919]

<sup>29</sup> On the relationship between Jászi and Masaryk cf. Szarka László: Trianoni alternatíva: Jászi Oszkár 1919. évi Masaryk-kritikája, In: Kisebbségi léthelyzetek – közösségi alternatívák, Lucidus, Budapest, 2004. 75–84. [the alternative of Trianon: Oszkár Jászi's 1919 critique of Masaryk]; Világ, 1919. január 5.

Yugoslavian, Czechoslovakian and Romanian armies surrounding Hungary enjoyed Allied support.

Jászi's "Helvetization" plan to divide the regions of Hungary with non-Hungarian majority inhabitants into federative districts or "cantons" and in the case of more complex national make up into federative governmental districts was doomed to fail from the start. There were three major reasons of failure: there was no international legal acknowledgment, no support came from the great powers, and Hungary was lacking military forces, thus the Hungarian government could not make its transitory provisions accepted by the non-Hungarian nationalists in their fever of founding their own nation states.

The idea of an "Eastern Switzerland" was not an equal possibility for two of the largest nationalities, Slovak and Romanian, in comparison to the option of Great Romania and Czechoslovakia respectively. In addition, during the preparations the model changed almost daily and was too uncomprehensible and too complex; it proved to be an unfeasible means of pacification because the ethnic-based delineation of cantons would have caused new conflicts. It has to be understood, that Jászi's nationality policy notwithstanding its failures was not the cause of the collapse of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1918. It was the only comprehensive political alternative offered to prevent the collapse of the country. The active national defence as an alternative – urged by Jászi himself from December 1918 onward as well as the suggestion of a Social-Democratic one-party government remained equally unacceptable at the time.