

Failed strategies

Abstract

There has been no courageous and convincing agreement over Transylvania's fate between Hungary and Romania: sincerity was lacking in most participants. There were even less of those who felt that the age-old disagreements should have been solved by such compromise as would have given full national self government to the Romanians of Transylvania and would not destroy the autonomy of its Hungarians either. It seems that literature could sometimes suggest a more acceptable political reality than the complicated arguments of politicians: the situation of Transylvania before World War I. as well as the dangers threatening the region were most creditably revealed by Endre Ady both in his political writings and his poetry.

It is my experience strengthening my belief that there have been very few in Hungary who have been willing or able to actually serve the interests of the country and even less who have been able to do so realising the political realities and adapting to them. Probably the representative of other East Central European nations could draw similar conclusions; however, if we consider that it is success that justifies national strategy and willingness to act, the Romanian, Czech, Slovak, Serbian and even the Polish intelligentsia were more deliberate and effective in handling their respective countries' affaires than Hungarians. This was so in the decade preceding the Trianon decisions, the fall of the old Hungary when there were only few so thoughtful to have tried preventing the perils awaiting the country while considering the political realities of the world and of Central Europe and most importantly their possible geopolitical consequences.

There were exceptions of course; among those in power there was István Tisza who tried to consolidate the country's situation by such a conservative strategy that it was doomed from the beginning; on the side of the opposition Mihály Károlyi who had no effective influence upon politics till the autumn of 1918; or even Oszkár Jászi, who offered strategic steps to consolidate historical Hungary, was without the necessary political power and when he finally obtained it, it was too late. In the non-political sphere the scholar Benedek Jancsó was such an exception who kept warning that the Hungarian Transylvania was in danger; and Endre Ady too (being a poet and Transylvanian) who probably was the most sensitively aware of the fate of the country but neither he could have foreseen what was actually to happen. The Hungarian public was deluded by the illusion of the millennium, busy with the strife with Austria and dreams about Hungary as a great power; nobody was ready to notice the approaching dangers thus the country was led toward its fall failing mental, political and military defence and it was a miracle that it has survived at all.

The fate signed at Trianon has frequently been claimed unavoidable; in his emigration Lajos Kossuth referred to the Austrian - Hungarian compromise of 1867 as the doom of Hungary in his 'Cassandra Letter'. Unlike his great opponent Görgei, he was fortunate and did not live to see the war which fulfilled his prophecy. Others have believed that the greed of the newly formed neighbouring countries to gain territories could not have been fent off, there were not anymore Hungarians to conscript and resistance would have led to even greater loss of territory; had it not been for the decision of the peace conference but for sheer military force, Debrecen would have remained under Romanian occupation, Miskolc under Czechoslovakian, Pécs under Yugoslavian.

All these statements are arguable. First of all after 1867 there was the possibility to found a nation-building strategy to consolidate the achievements of Deák and Andrassy, e.g. through compromises in nationality policy; its possibility was given by the nationality law of 1868 which was - as has been severally pointed out - the most tolerant nationality law in contemporary Europe. Then it could and must have been possible to withstand the occupation of the military forces of the Little Entente; in October 1918 there were still

2 million Hungarian soldiers in arms, a new army could have been organized, as Aurél Stromfeld organized his 'red army' which recaptured the towns of Kassa, Eperjes, Bártfa in the Upland, which of course at the time defended the country and not the 'proletarian dictatorship'. It also has to be mentioned that the February 1918 regulation of the Bucharest peace had not required the Romanian army to lay down their arms into the hands of the central powers; it was with the help of those arms the Romanians occupied Transylvania and parts of eastern Hungary. In the history of wars it is unusual on the part of the winners to allow the losers keeping their weapons. The Hungarian political leaders were unable to consolidate the still available army and use it for the protection of the country. Béla Kun called back the troops re-occupying the Upland in the hope of gaining points of merit for it at the peace conference (strange that a communist leader had such illusions about powers representing capitalism).

Let's not fall into the trap of wishful thinking what would have happened if the politicians had chosen a different strategy. However, sometimes history offers possibilities for a choice of political developments and it is worth analysing what ways were still open. There is the example of Turkey. There was a completely beaten humiliated Ottoman Empire; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk organized a new army, renounced the earlier treaty and was able to enter into a new one under more favourable conditions preserving all the Turkish regions in Anatolia. It is not probable that the French generals would had been ready to send their armies into battle for Czechoslovakian, Romanian and Serbian territorial claims. Though there was some resistance, e.g. Mihály Károlyi appearing in Szatmár, the battles of the Sekler troops, Stromfeld's north-eastern campaign, an organized, overall resistance was lacking and it makes one wonder how inevitable was the neglect.

Preludes to Trianon

At the time of the developments leading to Trianon it was the general Hungarian public opinion that before the defeat in World War I no one could have foresee what was to come. The essay of Iván Bertényi Jr. mentions how István Tisza was surprised when

after the peace talks Benedek Jancsó showed him maps drawn by the Romanian irredentists he had found in Bucharest archives and the Hungarian prime minister still believed it to be utter nonsense. But unfortunately it was not. Benedek Jancsó wanted to warn the Hungarian public to take heed of what is brewing in the Bucharest political and military circles. He published several articles on the topic: *Szabadságharcunk és a dáko-román törekvések* (1895)[our war of freedom and the Daco-Romanian aspirations], *A román nemzetiségi törekvések története* (1896-1899)[the history of the Romanian nationalistic aspirations], *Erdély és a nagyromán aspirációk* (1918) [Transylvania and the Great Romanian aspirations], and after the annexation of Transylvania: *A román irredentista mozgalmak története* (1921) [the history of the Romanian irredentist movements], the latter contains the results of his research in Bucharest archives.

It still remains a future task to make widely known the Transylvanian scholar's oeuvre and a new issue of his works would be necessary. Let's refer to *Erdély és a nagyromán aspirációk* which is based on his lectures held at the Association for the Propagation of Science and Knowledge in March 1917 – after the Romanian attacks against Transylvania but before the peace of Bucharest and without the knowledge of the archive material. The Hungarian political leaders left it completely unregarded because of the joy of the then successful war against Romania.

Benedek Jancsó reviewed several political documents, scholarly works as well schoolbooks written much before the outbreak of WWI which prove that the Romanian political and cultural leaders had made plans to annex Transylvania and the eastern regions of Hungary at a time when Romania claimed to be of an ally of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. He quotes the minutes the 12. June 1912 meeting of the Romanian Academy of Sciences where General Craiceanu declared in the king's presence that the first idea of Romania and the Romanian army was to protect the country; Another was to make the country complete especially that they were convinced that was what Europe expected of Romania, not immediately by military force, but maintaining the idea because who did not have such ideas did not deserve to survive. Not much afterward there was a publication in the summer 1913 issue of the Romanian

Army gazette *Revista Armatei* that the goal of the Romanian army was to put the emperor's crown on the head of King Carol and to offer him the imperial throne of "Dacia Traiana" (Romania + Transylvania) to unite the Romanian population of Máramaros, Crişana, Temeşiana, Transilvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia in the veins of whom the same brotherly blood was flowing, who had the same aspirations for their future and represented more than 14 million souls. It was the time of national ideals and the nations wanted to realize their ideals by every means. Nobody and nothing could stop this striving of the Romanians to fulfilment. The general promised it to be a long and terrible process but sooner or later every nation with such an ideal would succeed. The Romanian ideal is Great Romania between the Dnester, Tisza, Danube and the Black Sea. There was the ideal of Great Romania all ready.

From then on the Romanian politics and diplomacy used all means to win the support of the great powers to their foundation of an empire. In the case of Bessarabia they wanted German, of Transylvania French help, and these contradictory strategies explain the vacillation between two (German and French-Russian) orientations. It is known that Germany was ready to sacrifice Transylvania (a territory belonging to their own ally) for Romanian goodwill, just as French politicians were not unduly disturbed by Romanian claims over large areas of Hungary reaching east to the River Tisza where Romanians were in minority. The characteristically deplorable lack of information on the part of the French politicians dealing with the question of Transylvania was exemplified when Gustave Le Bon described the ethnic situation of Transylvania in his book *Enseignements psychologiques de la guerre Européennes* published in 1916, that there were 1,540 000 Romanians in contrast to 380 000 Hungarians, 560 000 Czechs, 234 000 Germans and 54 000 other nationalities. For some unknown reason the author believed the Seklers to be Czechs, not impossibly misled by Romanian sources.

There are more such reasoning and statements showing that the Romanian politics was all set to occupy large areas of Hungary much before the breach of treaty with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the attack on Transylvania, and the Romanian politicians of Transylvania supported the policy, albeit the 12th of August 1914 statement made in allegiance of the Monarchy in Arad when Austria had

just entered the war. According to the statement every Romanian familiar about history had to know that the Romanian people are traditionally faithful to the Monarchy. The fact gave them dignity and national pride and that it required sincerity and to renounce any dubious manifestations. Teodor Mihali Romanian nationality politician published an article in a Romanian newspaper of Hungary where he mentioned how willingly the Romanians joined the army and how eagerly they awaited the glorious results. Such statements inspired the prime minister István Tisza to start negotiations with Ion Mețianu, the metropolitan of Nagyszeben, on possible political concessions. Tisza hoped that such steps would reduce the hostile feelings against Hungary. He had to become disappointed because his suggestions were turned down not only by the Romanian politicians but Hungarian progressives too were enraged that Tisza was the initiator who had earlier withstood every nationality demands however rightful they were.

The Hungarian politicians were not able to understand the strategy of Bucharest politics or the aspiration of the Romanian leaders of Transylvania. Lutz Korodi Transylvanian Saxon politician and member of the Hungarian parliament (who was believed to be the agent of the Berlin staff) probably was right in his memoirs written for the German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg that Romanian irredentism had been quite widespread in Transylvania. Only those could notice it who knew the country, the Hungarians knew nothing about it because they were blinded by their own imperial vanity. Korodi was convinced that the moment the Austrian -Hungarian army suffered defeat the Romanians would occupy Transylvania. The Hungarians in Transylvania would completely powerless facing such a insurgency because they lived as an island surrounded by a Romanian sea, they would simply be crushed, on their one side 3 million Romanians in Transylvania and eastern Hungary, on the other the Romanian Kingdom. Besides the important passes leading to Romania had not been fortified.

Indeed the Romanian army streamed through these unprotected passes into Transylvania and started its offensive against Hungary on the force of the 17th August 1917 treaty between the Romanian government and the Entente powers. It is really enraging to read those professions of allegiance the members of parliament of Roma-

nian nationality made toward the Hungarian state adding that it were the Russians who threatened Romania and only the defeat of the Russian empire could save Romania.

Vaida-Voevod made a similar affirmative statement in the 15th September 1916 issue of the *Österreichische Rundschau* when he declared that that all the Romanians of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy are proud of their patriotic and dynastic behaviour, since it had always been very sad when their faith and patriotism had been questioned. What the words could not have proved their deed had done. The Romanian people of the Monarchy shook away the irredentist ideas and the knowledge is deeply rooted in them that their thank for their culture is due to the Monarchy; that they firmly believed that the problems between Hungarians and Romanians were mere disagreements between siblings; and now in the face of the Russian menace they must be united by the same fate.

Many were the people who were completely misled by such deceitful speech, so frequent stressing of loyalty, because the sentiments could have been sincere, e.g. they could have initiate a bold and convincing agreement between the Romanian and Hungarian political scene and contesting national strategies.

Ady and the Romanians

Unfortunately such sincerity was not general, on the Hungarian side there were only very few who thought that the centuries old debate of the two nations could have been solved by some compromise based on the more favourable traditions of coexistence by sincere goodwill. Such compromise would have been needed that would have given complete national self-government to the Romanians in Transylvania without destroying the self-determination of the Hungarians. One of the few representatives of the above ideas was Endre Ady, who offered suggestions worth having been taken – even today worth keeping in mind – to reduce the sometimes bitter hostilities endangering the future of both nations. Given, he was a poet who did not have to abide political necessities, to count with the consequences of the old mutual distrust. He could speak freely. It was the lack of free speech, the taboo of talking about political necessities that caused so much tragedy in modern Hungarian history. Literature

has often suggested more creditable realpolitik than the complicated reasoning of statesmen; and poets frequently see clearer and define more precisely the task awaiting the nation than political strategists. Hungarian literature has a vast pantheon of such seers: Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, , Attila József, Gyula Illyés are some of the outstanding examples.

The pre-war situation of Transylvania and the perils awaiting the region were probably best expressed in Ady's journalistic writings (and also in his poetry). In Ady's eyes Transylvania was a mythic country and one that is historically in a dangerous position. At the beginning of the 20th c. it should have been obvious that the policy of the Romanian government in Bucharest was increasingly guided by open aspirations to conquer. The leaders of the Romanian nationalist party in Transylvania were also thinking about tearing away Transylvania from Hungary. The open propaganda was braced by some caution in the behaviour of the Romanian politicians towards the Hungarian government, as was exemplified above. Ady was one of the first to recognize the dangers lurking around Hungarian Transylvania and since 1905 he gave sound to his fears while those who accused him to be unpatriotic took lightly the aggravated situation of the Transylvanian Hungarians.

In the 21st of January 1905 issue of the daily *Budapesti Napló* he published a critique of the play *Elnémult harangok* [silenced bells] in which he rejected the rethoricism of the play written by Viktor Rákosi and Dezső Malonyai and continued with a dark picture of the dangers threatening Hungarians in Transylvania. He described that he had observed how the earlier so strong Hungarian blood became Romanian and decadent in Co. Bihar, which is the outer edge of the region to the west. He had fear about the situation among the high mountains; there was a change and it was the better that had been swallowed up by the culturally less endowed. He believed Transylvania to be an endangered zone.

His next piece was *Se treasca* published in the 24th of May issue of *Budapesti Napló*. It was about the territorial aspirations of the Bucharest government based on the news that the Romanian Society of Ethnography announced the plan of a gazetteer of the place-names in Transylvania and 'attached regions' in the Romanian language. He tried to draw attention of to the facts and warn

those who constantly stressed their patriotism but did not take notice of the increasing territorial claims of Romanian irredentists. He referred to Ion Şirianu Russu, the editor of the Romanian nationalist newspaper *Tribuna Poporului* published in Arad who claimed to be pro-Hungarian but in his paper advocated Bucharest irredentism. Ady wrote that while the likes of Şirianu Russu seemingly faithful to Hungary try to loosen the not too strong bonds of the national state in Hungary, in Wallachia the young Romanian kingdom was about to spiritually devour it, as far as the Tisza, maybe. They kept alerting the western Romance countries that the big moment was approaching, Romania was ready to rise and the descendants of Emperor Traian to shake off the yogh of the 'Asian hordes'. And the scholarly society with in the presence of King Carol decided that the name of Nagyvárad should be Oradea Mare and that of Érmindszent Mencia. Ady wrote ironically about the Romanian irredentists whose effectiveness was not evident at the time, but he hoped that the case of the Romanian gazetteer would make people sit up. He remarked that it seemed the Romanian ethnographers were teaching the Hungarians about ethnography. Hungary should look around at home and try to put things in order, because evil spirits were lying in wait in wrath.

All Ady told about the probable fate of Transylvania remained unheeded. The poet's voice grew more dramatic in his article *S ha Erdélyt elveszik?* [If Transylvania be taken away?] published in the November-December 1912 issue of the periodical *Huszadik Század*, written in the first days of the I. Balkan war broken out in 1912. In this paper he was confident that Transylvania was the token of Hungary's historic vitality and an eventual loss of the region would shake the Hungarian nation and state to its fundamentals, because at the time when the European nation states developed Transylvania represented Hungary.

He also described the justification of 'Transylvanianism' in the framework of the history of ideas. He stated that Transylvania represented a special kind of mentality and the planned changes of the map could cut off the two twin nations of it, Hungarians and Romanians. The Saxons are able to live or perish on their own as they had always lived separated as the German colonies had done in Russia. But the Hungarians and Romanians would be uprooted when they would be

torn apart following by the crazy military world social democracy was still unable to stop and the situation be treated on diplomats' diagnoses. He found the situation tragic because the war had stepped into its democratic revolution. He is of the opinion that the strong nationalistic policy would make the two nations homeless and he was convinced that the Hungarians would be worse off if gobbled up by Romania than the Romanians had been in Transylvania.

In all truth Ady had known only his birthplace Érdmindszent in the region known as the Partium, then Nagyvárad, Temesvár and Kalotaszeg; it was in the summer of 1915 that he visited the historical inner part of Transylvania the first time. His wedding with Berta Boncza in Budapest on the 27th of March, the couple moved to Csucs and country life cut him off from the politics, the literary circles of Budapest but made him all the more vulnerable to the fear of the war. In those difficult days György Bölöni visited him accompanied by his wife to ease Ady's solitude who had complained much in his letters. Much later, in the November 1957 issue of *Igaz Szó* published in Marosvásárhely and dedicated to Ady's memory, Bölöni remembered the days spent with Ady and his wife, travelling about in the neighbouring places visiting acquaintances in his memoirs *Ady ismerkedése Erdéllyel* [Ady being acquainted with Transylvania].

That was how the decision was made to travel around the inner regions of Transylvania. The two couples, Ady and his wife and Bölöni with his wife, took the train and travelled to Brassó; the town's ancient look, urbanity and style were a great surprise to Ady who up till then had known mostly the dusty village like towns of the Great Plain. Then by the Secler circle-line the reached Marosvásárhely to visit György Bernády, the Lord Lieutenant of Co. Maros-Torda, earlier the mayor of the town, who had done most for the urbanisation of the 'Secler capital' than anybody else. He had made build the famous Art Nouveau building of the Palace of Culture. Ady told about the experience of the visit in *A magyarság háza* [The house of the Hungarians] published in the monthly *Nyugat* in August 1915, claiming that he regarded it as a refuge for the Hungarians who had sinned so much against one another. This was the place to meet for music, poetry and talks. It was meant as an hommage to Bernády who Ady felt as a relation because both of them were true Hungarians.

The poet's visit became widely known in Marosvásárhely. The representatives of the local intellectual circles came to meet him and Ady suddenly became the centre of celebrations. The memories of the short stop in Marosvásárhely left deep impressions in Ady and if there were not any references of it in his writings he talked frequently about the experience and kept in touch. From there they went to Szováta and bathed in the famous Lake Medve the water of which is so salty that it is impossible to sink. Afterwards they returned back to Csucsá. Ady gave an account of the journey in a letter to his brother in July 1915.

Bölöni may be right that Ady did not write any detailed travelogue of the journey, however, he reflected on it in some of his journalistic pieces and poems, too, e.g. *A fajtam takarója* [the cover of my kind], *Intés az őrzőkhöz* [warning to the guardians]. These writings, however, were neglected by later researchers of Ady's oeuvre and were not included in the 1977 collection of journalistic papers; such are *Lenn, Erdély földjén* [Down in the land of Transylvania] published in the 25. July 1915 issue of *Világ*, the above mentioned *A magyarság háza*, and *Az oláh mumus* [The Romanian bogeyman] in *Nyugat* August 1915. These pieces continue the thought of *S ha Erdélyt elveszik?* mentioned above.

Lenn, Erdély földjén summed up the experiences of the journey describing the beauty of the country and, as a contrast the devastations of history. He quoted the Book of Chronicles of the Old Testament to describe the ordeal of the region and the new perils lurking around; he repeated his conviction that Hungary should regard Transylvania as its source of renewal, concluding that Transylvania is Hungary and if there was need for Hungary, Transylvania had to remain Hungarian.

Ady contemplated the fate of Transylvania and the approaching dangers with anxiety but with forced confidence. It is interesting though not unusual that Ady's survey was dismissed from two sides the leading Romanian politicians in Transylvania on the one hand and the official Hungarian trendsetters on the other. On the 26th of August 1915 *Românul*, the Romanian newspaper of Arad vehemently rejected the poet's elaboration in spite of the fact that earlier it had hailed Ady as a friend of the Romanian people. *Ady úr csúfot üz a románokból* [Mr. Ady makes fun of the Romanians] was the title of

the anonymous article that declared that Hungarians had a poet who albeit fed on French culture could not gain entrance to the editors of Budapest newspapers. The 'Mr. Poet' had become impotent and to save face he ridiculed the Romanian people in the last issue of *Nyugat*; than it concluded that the Romanians have a future not prepared by Ady's poems in reactionary editors' offices.

Magyar Kultúra a militantly conservative Catholic periodical also reflected to Ady's article and attacked the poet from the other side charging him with two-timing. The false accusations coming from two opposing directions affirm the undoubted truth of the poet.

Ady clearly recognised the dangers approaching toward Transylvania; he had dark visions about the fate of the Hungarians there, however, he tried to becalm himself by sober political reasoning. The tragic ambivalence can be observed in the short piece *Az oláh mumus* where he tried to debate with dark prophecies about the loss of Transylvania. He believed that the 'Romanian bogieman' was tolerable, conquerable and he could not wish anything worse than Transylvania for him. Only Kolozsvár, Brassó, Marosvásárhely would mean danger for him, because the Romanians would perish in the highly cultural environment. He believed this would not happen because Hungary would not let it. He quoted a Romanian lawyer who declared that he would have been upset had had his proceeding been in Bucharest instead of Budapest. *Románul* reacted rudely to this writing hurting Ady's honour both as a human being and a poet.

Ady's soul tried to cling to a reasonable vision of the future in vain, to the illusion that neither Hungary nor the civilized western world was ready to give up Transylvania. In the last days of the war he had to realise that all his hopes were self-deception, his vision false. The war he always condemned ended in defeat and collapse that also determined the fate of Transylvania too. At the end of October Ady was lying in his deathbed and tore his Bible, he always kept at his bed, to pieces, a fatally symbolic deed. On the 16th of November he was taken to the festivities in the Houses of Parliament to celebrate the proclamation of the Republic, wrote *Üdvözet a győzőnek* [Greeting to the winner], his last poem, not only his farewell to life but to his historic hopes too. His biographers, Gyula Földessy, György Bölöni,

Miksa Fenyő and Lajos Ady reported that he had not been conscious at the time of the Romanian occupation of Transylvania. As if providence had wanted to protect him of realisation with a clear mind that the region he regarded as a place of mythical heights and historical example, Transylvania was lost.



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