

HUNGARIAN ESPIONAGE IN ROMANIA 1918–1940

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ABSTRACT

The book represents the fruit of a concern, which derives from the sense of duty and conscience towards the homeland, of a Romanian who will remain anonymous in the ranks of written history. Also in the unknown logic of destiny is the fact that a relative of this officer kept this manuscript hidden until December 21, 1990, a moment he considered to be an opportune moment for publication and through the kindness of Mr. Ioan Dumitru, the pages of the manuscript knew the ink of the Concordia publishing house in Timișoara. The wish of the counter-intelligence officer from the Romanian espionage service, to leave a manuscript to the next generations, which consists in clearly mentioning the dangers and the gaps of the organization of the Romanian administration, with the specific purpose of eliminating them as well as the risk of creating new territorial seizures, the fear rising to the level of the disappearance of Romania as an independent and sovereign state. The fate of the author will remain unknown but taking into account the fact that he wrote the lines of this book in 1942, in the middle of the Second World War, when Romania was directly under the military pressure of Nazi Germany, after significant territorial losses, directly underlines the importance of the moment of the beginning and organization of the Hungarian espionage service, whose infrastructure was created with the support of Germany, from before the First World War. The author himself confesses at the very beginning of the book that he bled from the young age of 18 for the integration of the country he loves "more than anything in this world", a fact that indirectly indicates to us that the author of the manuscript is one of the heroes who have fought in the war of national reunification and put the national ideal of Greater Romania before everything else. The novelty that this book presents lies in the fact that regardless of the size of Budapest's effort, both internally and externally, to consider itself wronged in the face of history and the Trianon treaty, the Hungarianization process continues with even more intense force compared to the dualistic period. The territorial rapture dictated from Vienna represents nothing more than the consequence of a whole series of activities in the field of cultural diplomacy of Budapest, regarding the historical revenge directed against the Trianon treaty. It is true that the level of hardness is not as high, but the increasing subtlety of the Hungarianization phenomenon demonstrates Budapest's active and continuous concern to regain lost territory.

Keywords: Trianon, Hungarianization, espionage, Transylvania.

SHORT INTRODUCTION

The book published by Ioan Dumitru at the Concordia publishing house represents a unique chance that the author decided to offer to a synthesis manuscript written by a Romanian officer from Romania's counterintelligence service. At the same time, the book represents a unique chance offered to the general public to go behind the scenes of the unseen history of Romania from that period, as well as a chance to offer the reader a tool to decode the strategy that has reverberations to this day.

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The author's exhortation as well as the purpose of the manuscript that saw the light of print can be reduced to the following essence:

"I wrote these study notes out of an exhortation to do my duty of conscience towards my homeland, Romania, for which I bled at an early age 18 years old and whom I love more than anything in this world. And I also wrote to them with the hope that they will resonate and enlighten people, with love for their country, will find the best solution (...) in order to protect Romania from occult interests"⁴⁴⁹.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HUNGARIAN SPY SERVICE IN ROMANIA

Before the war of national integration

The infrastructure of the espionage system

In order to be able to understand the entire spider web type ramification, created inside Romania by the Hungarian secret service, the author provides a brief history of this fact. Things begin to take shape from the time of King Charles I, who concluded a secret alliance with the central powers, corroborated with

"Hungarian arrogance that disregarded the humble Wallachian population from the East and South of the Carpathians"⁴⁵⁰.

gave Austria-Hungary the leeway to find out information only through legations and military attachés. Contrary to the dualist approach, Germany was not exactly sure of the alliance with King Charles because they "considered the treaties then as now as scraps of paper"⁴⁵¹ and since they foresaw the European war a long time ago, they organized an extensive espionage service in our country, especially an economic one, which they managed right from the office of their plenipotentiary minister⁴⁵². The goodwill of the king and politicians allowed the German agents, without much effort, to

"take control of us and make intensive and thorough studies on Romania's production, on the possibilities of gathering resources, going with these studies to the point that they decided in advance even the loading places as well as the necessary means of transport"⁴⁵³.

Thus, knowing our territory in detail, the result of this constant and painstaking activity was that at the time of the occupation of Oltenia and Muntenia in the First World War, the Germans extracted the maximum resources that our country could

⁴⁴⁹ „Am scris aceste note de studiu din îndemnul de a mi face datoria de conștiință față de patria mea, România, pentru care am sângerat la vârsta fragedă de 18 ani și pe care o iubesc mai mult ca orice pe lumea aceasta. Și l-am mai scris de asemenea cu speranța că ele vor avea răsunet și oameni luminați cu dragoste de țară vor găsi soluționarea (...) punerii la adăpost a României de uneltirile oculte.”, in Ioan Dumitru, *Spionajul Maghiar în România 1918–1940 [Hungarian espionage in Romania 1918–1940]*, Timișoara, Concordia Publishing House, 1990, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁰ „trufia maghiară care desconsidera umila populație valahă de la Est și Sud de Carpați”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵¹ „socoteau și atunci ca și astăzi tratatele drept petice de hârtie”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵³ „să pună stăpânire pe noi și să facă studii intense și minuțioase asupra producției României, asupra posibilităților de adunare a resurselor, mergând cu aceste studii până acolo încât au hotărât dinainte până și locurile de încărcare precum și mijloacele de transport necesare”, in *Ibidem*, p. 6.

offer until “the last egg and the last grain of wheat”⁴⁵⁴. It is important to know that the result of these studies was known only in Berlin and Austria-Hungary received general information or almost nothing. This continued until 1915 when the political attitude in Romania began to take shape, at which time the dual monarchy began to think about organizing an espionage service directed against Romania and a first step consisted in the agreement with the German secret service towards to provide them with information “of all categories and in all domains”⁴⁵⁵. Based on this information, the Austro-Hungarian General Headquarters established a special espionage section for Romania organized in two offices: the office for the centralization of information and the office for studies and exploitation of information. The information was obtained by resident informants recruited from businessmen in Romania, as well as based on the activity of special informants who roamed the country unhindered far and wide⁴⁵⁶.

How the information was obtained

The way in which the information was collected from the field comes from the revelations of a former Hungarian spy, originally from Sibiu, who was active in the Hungarian espionage service against Romania, throughout the first world war. From his confession, two ideas emerge that show how it was possible to easily gather important information by the spies in Romania: first of all, “the all-pervading corruption of that time”⁴⁵⁷ but also “the extraordinary carelessness that still reigns today”⁴⁵⁸.

Regarding corruption, a former spy testifies to the fact that he roamed the country unhindered by anyone thanks to the use of money, firmly stating that in Romania anyone could be easily corrupted “starting from border guards and up to the highest official of the country”⁴⁵⁹. Moreover, it shows that he was also aided to a great extent by the “extremely corrupt and cowardly Jewish element”⁴⁶⁰ who was very well placed especially in the commercial circles of the country. For example, with the help of money and some Jews, he was able to create in Bucharest a circle of trust that offered him the most reliable information among politicians, gentlemen and ladies from high society, but also among highly skilled business agents recruited from the turn of the Jewish element.

Regarding negligence, the spy’s revelations seem to be in the realm of fantasy, not even Romania’s enemies could believe that such things would have been possible. A convincing example is the fact that this spy was able to find out the date of Romania’s entry into the first world war (August 15, 1916), a fact that shows the level of corruption and the power of the money in front of which nothing, not even

⁴⁵⁴ „la ultimul ou și ultima boabă de grâu”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁵ „de toate categoriile și din toate domeniile”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁷ „corupția atotstăpânitoare din acea vreme”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁸ „neglijența ieșită din comun care mai domnește și astăzi”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁹ „începând de la grăniceri de santinelă și până la cel mai înalt funcționar al țării”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶⁰ „elementul evreiesc extrem de corupt și de laș”, in *Ibidem*.

the defense of the country, can resist. But will the money be enough to give the opponents a complete picture of the internal situation? Not by a long shot, because the ease and carelessness of some important actors in the Romanian state allowed any spy to find out secret things even from public spaces. This was possible because discussions of secret matters occurred “in trams, public places, on the street, in the train, in the family and in front of everyone”⁴⁶¹. To understand these things, the former spy confesses a case of incredible negligence:

“I was traveling about two weeks before Romania’s entry into the war, towards Iași, in a first-class compartment of a train in which there were a general and several officers. Thinking that I was English and that I did not know Romanian, the general and the officers began to discuss military training and the intentions of the General Staff in case of war. In order to be more explicit, the general drew on a map, located on the wall of the compartment, the area of concentration and the direction of advance of some armies up to the region where the First Army and the Fourth Army will meet and then together they will advance towards Budapest. Obviously, I continued my journey until the officers got off the train, and then I tore the map from the wall, delighted to have acquired such a valuable piece of information”⁴⁶².

Considering the seriousness of the strategic mistakes, it is possible to understand the necessity of the French general Berthelot coming to the country in order to reorganize the Romanian army, starting on October 15, 1916. King Ferdinand himself appoints Berthelot his advisor, at the same time signing an order duty through which he could inspect the entire Romanian army, and the findings and proposals of the French general became mandatory⁴⁶³.

After the First World War

The separation from Austria and the loss of the provinces which she had hitherto held, placing Hungary within her natural borders, produced a very strong reaction, or rather a terrible rematch.

The reaction consisted of an aggressive propaganda among the member states of the League of Nations to whom they formulated their claims in successive stages and secretly laid the foundations of a solid espionage organization.

⁴⁶¹ „în tramvaie, localuri publice, pe stradă, în tren, în familie și în fața oricui”, in *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴⁶² „Călătoream cu vreo două săptămâni înainte de intrarea în război a României, spre Iași, într-un compartiment de clasa I a unui tren în care se găseau un general și mai mulți ofițeri. Crezându-mă că sunt englez și că nu știu românește, generalul și ofițerii au început să discute despre pregătirea militară și intențiile pe care le avea Statul Major în caz de război. Generalul pentru a putea fi mai explicit a desenat pe o hartă, aflată pe peretele compartimentului, zona de concentrare și direcția de înaintare a unor armate până în regiunea unde Armata I și Armata a IV se vor întâlni și apoi împreună vor înainta către Budapesta. Evident, am continuat călătoria până ce ofițerii au coborât din tren și apoi am smuls harta din perete, încântat că am căpătat o informație așa de prețioasă”, in *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴⁶³ Dan Falcan, „I-a propus regele Ferdinand lui Henri Berthelot șefia Marelui Stat-Major al Armatei Române?” [“Did King Ferdinand propose to Henri Berthelot to be the head of the Romanian Army General Staff?”], in *Historia*, Available at: <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/i-a-propus-regele-ferdinand-lui-henri-berthelot-567150.html>, Accessed on: July 8, 2024.

Regarding the border review claims, Hungary had a plan in 3 successive stages:

1. The first stage, also called the “minimum stage” which claimed the immediate annexation of the territories with a 50% Hungarian population and which, according to their claims, would have included the counties of Timișoara, Arad, Oradea, Cluj, Satu Mare, Zalău, Someș, Bistrița, Mureș Aiud, Odorhei and Three Chairs.
2. The 2nd stage, called the “maximum stage” called for the launching of a plebiscite in the rest of the lands which also decides on the remaining lands of Romania where the population would have pronounced in favor of Hungary.
3. The 3rd stage, which proposed to be carried out by means of arms, had as its objective the restoration of the old Hungary with the borders of 1914.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HUNGARIAN ESPIONAGE SERVICE

The Hungarian spy service came into being right from 1920, being organized by Regent Horthy, who collaborated closely with Lieutenant-Colonel Zoldt, who for 20 years was the head of the intelligence service. From the personnel point of view, great importance was given to perfecting specialization and stability considering that in this way not only a good yield is obtained but “the personnel used is used to the territory and the enemy”⁴⁶⁴.

From the analysis of the documents of the file 121 C.W. it appears that the espionage against Romania was organized as follows: a main information center located in Szolnok, which has two more subordinate centers, a larger one in Miskolcisz and the other, somewhat smaller, in Szeged. In turn, the Szolnok center is organized into sub-centers as follows:

- a. the Debrețin sub-centre had the mission of surveillance of the portion between Careii Mari and Ordea, with unlimited reach in depth;
- b. the sub-centre at Szehalaholm had the portion between Oradea and Arad, also with unlimited depth;
- c. the sub-centre at Szentes, had the region in the southern area of Arad, with unlimited depth.

PETTY OR BORDER ESPIONAGE

This presupposes that each border unit must perfectly know the border terrain both on their own territory and on the foreign one, to a depth of 20 km, in order to be able on the one hand to facilitate unobserved crossings and on the other hand to it can be made easier in case of war to cover actions. In addition to this, the level of detail goes up to the names of the commanders of the Romanian border guard units,

⁴⁶⁴ „se obișnuiește personalul întrebuițat cu teritoriul și dușmanul”, in *Ibidem*, p. 12.

the post level and the names of the commanders of the large units in the border area as well as the heads of offices⁴⁶⁵. Moreover, the knowledge of the terrain is not only necessary among military officers, but the picture in the territory of the enemy must be completed by a press officer, who also, at a depth of 20 km, must know data from all categories such as

“the situation frontier regiments, troop deployments, supervised or unsupervised field works, the population and the movement of the population including officials”⁴⁶⁶.

THE ORGANIZATION OF HUNGARIAN ESPIONAGE AND PROPAGANDA IN ROMANIA

It should be mentioned from the beginning that Hungarian espionage in Romania is organized directly from Horthy's cabinet and the propaganda section is organized by division general Zolt. The latter had the mission of undermining Romania's state organization both among the army and in the administration, through the Hungarian party in Romania. In order to increase the information staff, they appeal to the feeling of nationality and to the current insecurity, the agent's conviction being made gradually, promising him the rewards that will await both him and his accomplices when Hungary triumphs.

With the moment of 1920, Budapest understood that a paradigm shift was required, in order to eliminate the “injustice”: if until the revolution of 1848 Hungarianization was done by force and by enticements, every Romanian who embraced the Hungarian cause was ennobled and received the estates in Transylvania or in the Hungarian hinterland, after 1848

“when the hard means of Hungarianization no longer worked, they resorted to two systems, the church and the culture”⁴⁶⁷.

Things went so well in favor of the Hungarians that in 1914 the Hungarians predicted that

“in a few decades they will succeed in Hungarianizing all or almost all of the Romanian population”⁴⁶⁸.

The appearance of the Hungarian party in Romania must be understood as a reaction of Budapest to the disintegration of the empire after Trianon⁴⁶⁹, with the

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁴⁶⁶ „situația grănicerilor, dislocări de trupe, lucrări de teren supravegheate sau nesupravegheate, populația și mișcarea populației inclusiv a funcționarilor”, in *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁴⁶⁷ „când mijloacele dure de maghiarizare nu a mai mers au recurs la două sisteme, cel bisericesc și cel cultural”, in *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁴⁶⁸ „în câteva decenii vor reuși să maghiarizeze toată sau aproape toată populația românească”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

addition that the means of action have also been adapted to the new reality. Thus, two large categories of action can be seen, in addition to espionage actions:

In the religious field

As for the religious system, where Hungarianization through the religious path was impossible due to dogmatic differences and beyond the subterfuge of the united church, when rivalries arose, priority was given to religion and not to nationality, a fact that suited the Hungarians who are “raised and watered at the well Hungarian Catholicism”⁴⁷⁰. It must not be forgotten that the Catholic priest, in his work as a clergyman, seeks to drag Hungarian women to obtain all kinds of information that they know or hear at home or in the groups where their husbands are active.

In the cultural field

The school also has an important role because through the school the child is inoculated from an early age that

“he is Hungarian, and the propaganda always tells him that he has a persecuted homeland that sooner or later will wake up and come to claim its rights”⁴⁷¹.

While the school tells the children to avoid any mixing with Wallachians, the propaganda instructs the young men to avoid Romanian women but urges the girls to marry Romanians⁴⁷².

Of real interest are the connections of Romanian officers married to minorities of Hungarian nationality, Hungarian agents putting indirect pressure, being alone by the husbands’ feelings towards their wives, speculating on the one hand sentimentally but on the other hand from the point of view of the Hungarian nation’s gratitude to by those who help her. It is also worth noting the fact that from a marriage with a Hungarian woman, all the boys and girls are completely Hungarian at heart:

“these children grow up Hungarian, learn only Hungarian, eat Hungarian and most of the time embrace the Catholic religion”⁴⁷³.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our present duty is to make use of all this experience, and to seek, by a systematic education, at least in the army, to remove the dangerous defects which may at any time lead to our destruction⁴⁷⁴. Moreover, it is clear that for

⁴⁷⁰ „crescuți și adăpați la fântâna catolicismului maghiar”, in *Ibidem*, p. 69.

⁴⁷¹ „este maghiar iar propaganda îi spune mereu că are o patrie urgisită care mai curând sau mai târziu se va deștepta și va veni să-și revendice drepturile”, in *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁴⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷³ „acești copii cresc ungurește învață numai ungurește mănâncă ungurește și de cele mai multe ori îmbrățișează religia catolică”, in *Ibidem*, p. 76.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Romania it is vital for the agents in the field to receive the principles of patriotism and on the basis of these qualities to realize their specialization and improvement in order to defend the national existence⁴⁷⁵.

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⁴⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.