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Government-Coordinated Internal Colonization in the Era of Nationalism: The Case of Dualist Hungary

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Abstract

Between 1881 and 1914, Hungarian governments established at least 36 agricultural colonies in today's territory of Romania (nine new villages and 25 neighborhoods attached to existing ones). After 1894, a separate government fund was created for land purchases and the venture was entrusted to a Department of Colonization within the Ministry of Agriculture. This article gives an archival-based account of the political, financial, agricultural, and logistical aspects of the settlement program and compares it with its better-researched Prussian model. Investigating it as a series of interactions between settlers, the dedicated government agency, local potentates, and the surrounding population, it identifies structural impediments to the endeavor. Although there was a broad unity across political parties behind the idea of conquering new territories for the ethnic nation, the settlement program rested on a fragile consensus within the elite. Its expansion after 1900 was mainly due to Minister Ignác Darányi, whereas the steps of other high officials give nuances to Hungarian nationalities policies. When Prime Minister István Tisza dropped the program on the eve of the First World War, it was already in a state of hibernation because the governing party had realized that the settlers posed a political liability for them.

Keywords: Banat; Dualist Hungary; internal colonization; migration; Transylvania

State and nonstate actors had sought to harness migratory flows to their political and economic ends earlier, but in the 1880s, several European states suddenly embarked on resettling peasant populations over great distances within their borders to alter the ethnic balance in problem areas and thereby secure territory. There was no other trigger for these simultaneous projects than the coupling of territoriality and ethnonationalism, which came to a head with the territorial rearrangement of the Balkans at the Berlin Congress of 1878. Romania made colonization a state monopoly in 1882, attracting 100,000–200,000 Romanian-speakers to the newly acquired Dobruja from wherever it could find them (Iordachi 2002, 29–36). With the 1889 law on permanent resettlement, Russian authorities moved from hindering the spontaneous movement of peasants to encouraging it and diverting its flow to Siberia, the Asiatic steppes, the North Caucasus, and Poland. They came to view internal migration from a nationalist angle, supporting the resettlement of Russians and preventing that of Germans and Jews (Sunderland 2004, 178–218; Steinwedel 2016, 200). The experiences of overseas settler colonialism inspired such policies, the most obvious being the Prussian venture, which was also the one most widely reported at the time (Nelson 2010). The Prussian government completed a fact-finding mission to study the internal colonization in the prairies of Canada and the United States and then launched an aggressive resettlement campaign to outnumber the Polish majority in its Poznan and West Prussia provinces, supposedly inefficient

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as farmers, with ethnic Germans. It created a resettlement commission in 1886 with 100 million marks of seed money, which increased to 350 million by 1902 (Eddie 2009).

The change in the perception of internal colonization is well captured by the way the Hungarian parliament debated two bills on colonist settlements in 1872 and 1894. In 1872, the possibility of increasing their numbers was not even mentioned in passing. The settlements in question lay on treasury estates or manorial lands, and their tenants posed a problem because they had not been included in the emancipation of serfs in 1848. The debate centered on the question of the extent to which these colonists should be allowed to redeem the land they worked. They appeared as troublesome relics of the past, and although many of them were native Hungarian speakers (Magyars) and most of them lived in ethnically mixed areas of what was then Southern Hungary, their question was not framed in terms of ethnic politics (*Képviselőházi napló 1872–75*, 2:229–244, 249–278). By 1894, the same parliament had seen internal colonization not only as an antidote to the uneven distribution of the population, to land hunger, and emigration but also as an instrument to enforce the “Hungarian state idea” in the non-Magyar peripheries (*Képviselőházi napló 1892–97*, 15:336–357).

Meanwhile, the prevailing political discourse had come to regard the country’s ethnolinguistic diversity as an urgent security problem. The tension between a civil and an ethnic concept of the nation fueled public discussions: the political-cultural community of all citizens projected into the future and the ethnolinguistic category of Magyars understood as its prototype. The latter was defined primarily on linguistic grounds, although Magyars were also seen as discretely different from Eastern Christian Romanians and Serbs based on their Protestant or Latin-rite Catholic religion. It was far from clear how to address the gap between the wider and the narrower categories. Not only did the 1890 census find that 48% of the citizens could not speak Hungarian, but the people newly defined as national minorities were also claimed by national movements and “kin states.”¹ But whether the ruling elites wished to mark the territory as Magyar, impose cultural hegemony, or make non-Magyars adopt Hungarian, the resettlement of Magyar peasants to minority-majority areas seemed a timely way to approach these goals.

There were other reasons as well for the transfer of Magyars from Central Hungary to the ethnic peripheries. During the same period, Hungarian landowners organized themselves as a political lobby group speaking for all of agriculture. In the 1890s, they saw one of the reasons for the harvest strikes that shook the Central Hungarian Plain in a surplus population among the land-poor peasantry. In their view, channeling this supposed surplus into areas considered underused promised to ease the tensions and, if done under proper guidance, raise agricultural standards (“A közgazdasági szakosztály ülése: 1895. május 4,” *Köztelek*, May 11, 1895, 812–813). So much for the better if it also coincided with nation-building interests (Károlyi 1900).

The ensuing government program to settle Magyar peasants in the majority Romanian, Serbian, and German-speaking zones of the Banat and Transylvania has been only sporadically researched—although this is a rare area of Hungarian nationalities policy in the Austro-Hungarian period where archival sources are preserved intact.² Behind the militant propaganda that portrayed the settlers as a vanguard against a color-coded ethnic map was a social experiment in which settlement overseers constantly monitored the settlers. I draw on their reports, internal correspondence, and other archival sources to examine the dynamics of the program as a series of interactions between various levels of the dedicated government agency, local power holders, the settlers, and the surrounding population. This will reveal a tangle of internal contradictions, conflicting political and economic interests, structural hurdles, and unintended consequences, which held the Hungarian program in check and ultimately derailed it. Although there was a broad unity across political parties behind the idea of conquering new territories for the ethnic nation and thwarting national minority movements, it turned out that the settlement program rested on a fragile consensus within the elite. Its expansion after 1900 was mainly due to the determination of Minister Ignác Darányi, whereas the steps of other high officials give nuances to Hungarian nationalities policies. When Prime Minister István Tisza dropped the program on the eve of the First World War, it was already in a state of hibernation because the governing party had realized that the settlers, who in many

ways did not behave as expected, posed a political liability for them. In the meantime, keeping the large estates in the “non-Magyar” peripheries in “Magyar” hands had become a priority over resettlement.

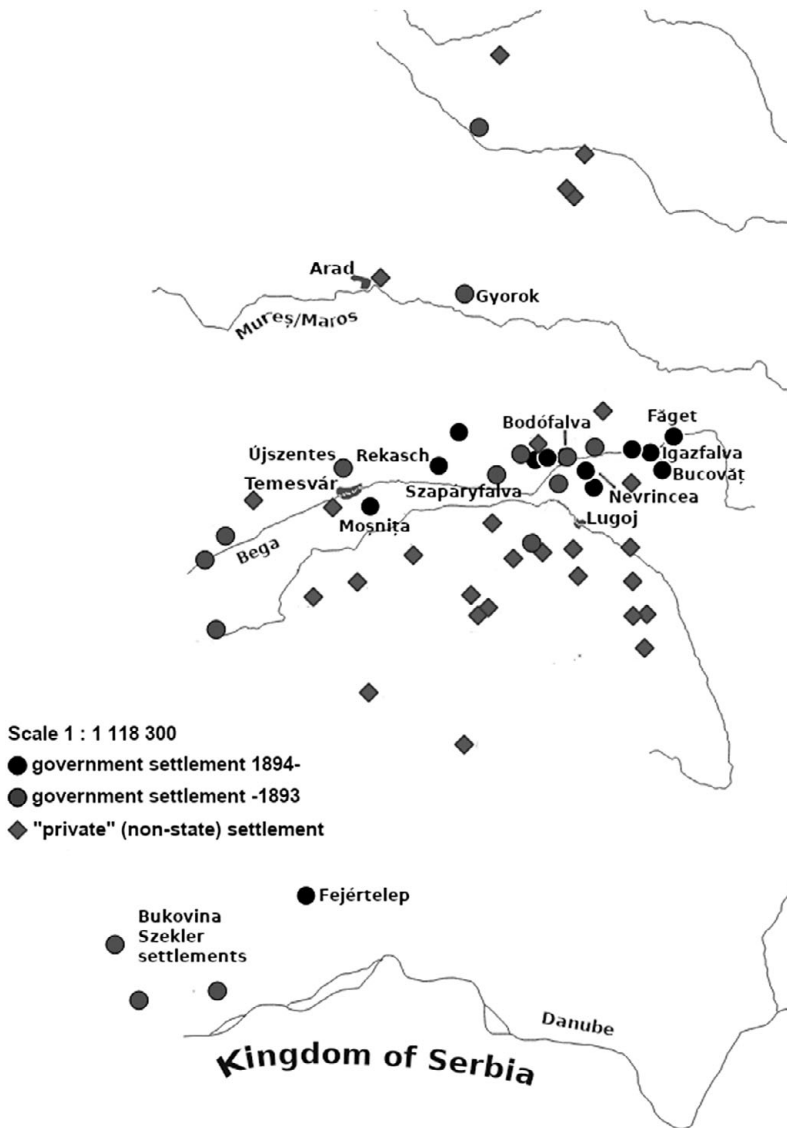
Although there was a local tradition of peasant colonization in the Banat, the idea of the settlement program was clearly indebted to external models. The aristocrat who pioneered the issue at the Budapest Ministry of Agriculture made study trips to the Prussian East and the North American frontier and wrote books about both (Széchenyi 1883, 1893). Later, the same ministry gathered information on internal colonization and land subdivision from all over Europe. However, policy makers in Hungary paid the most attention to the Prussian model and politicians and experts measured the Hungarian program to its size. I revisit the comparison with the better-known Prussian venture with the benefit of hindsight and drawing on its rich and multifaceted literature.

1. Setting the Wheels in Motion

The first Hungarian government settlement in a nationalist mold began as a grassroots initiative and was poorly organized. In 1882, a group of intellectuals planted the idea of “homecoming” in the minds of Bukovina Szeklers, descendants of refugees who had settled in the Habsburg Bukovina in the 1770s and 1780s. Instead of repatriating them in their ancestral Szeklerland, the Hungarian government allotted them land on the bank of the Danube in the South, where it formed the border with Serbia. By all appearances, they served the nation better inside the borders than outside and on the ethnic periphery than in a Hungarian-speaking region. A memorandum from the government-appointed special commissioner indicates that many hoped their arrival would be the first step in creating a chain of Hungarian-speaking settlements along the Banat stretch of the Danube (Map 1). He rightly considered this a pipe dream and warned against moving the settlers to the flood-prone riverbank.³ However, after the 4,000 Szeklers had been carried across half the country in a triumphal procession, wined and dined, they were finally left at the mercy of the water and malaria, with neither the necessary amenities nor the tools to till their land. The Danube washed them out after four years. The flood-control measures implemented by the state did not provide a permanent solution but turned the settlers against the treasury officials trying to recover some of the costs. They found homes in three villages on the Danube, while a part was resettled in distant, majority Romanian areas—in Gyorok/Ghioroc east of Arad and the outskirts of the Transylvanian towns of Déva/Deva and Hunedoara/Vajdahunyad. Many returned disappointed to the Bukovina, and those who remained eked out a living as laborers (László 2005, 100–104).⁴

The Hungarian public recognized this adventure as a debacle, but it aroused long-term interest in the resettlement of Magyar populations. Plans were under preparation at the Ministry of Agriculture, which had held state forests since 1881 and gradually took over the administration of the southern treasury estates (Csernovics 1913, 35, 39, 44).⁵ The Banat in particular became one of the main targets. Two centuries of wars on the confines of the Ottoman Empire had devastated the Banat flatlands by the late 17th century. The sparse Serbian- and Romanian-speaking Orthodox stockbreeding population at the time of the reconquista was later reinforced with new immigrants, and in the second half of the 18th century, the Habsburgs settled a hundred thousand German agricultors. The population of the entire province grew from 120,000 in 1716 to 650,000 in the late 1780s while the settlement network was reshuffled (Kovács 1998). The boom of tobacco growing spawned a smaller wave of partly Hungarian-speaking settlements in the Napoleonic and the Vormärz periods, most of which still owed redemption money around 1900. The few new settlements of the 1880s on treasury lands, on the other hand, were settled from within the Banat, partly with German and Magyar flood victims and partly with long-term lessees (Érkövy 1883, 210–211).

In 1888, the Ministry designated 21,650 yokes of compact lowland forest along the upper reaches of the Bega River in the northeastern Banat (Krassó-Szörény County) for clearing and subsequent colonization (Lovas 1908, 68). From 1893, with the founding of Igazfalva, Andrászáza (later Bodófalva) and the expansion of Bucováţ, more and more Magyar settlers were brought from



Map 1. New and enlarged settlements in the Banat.

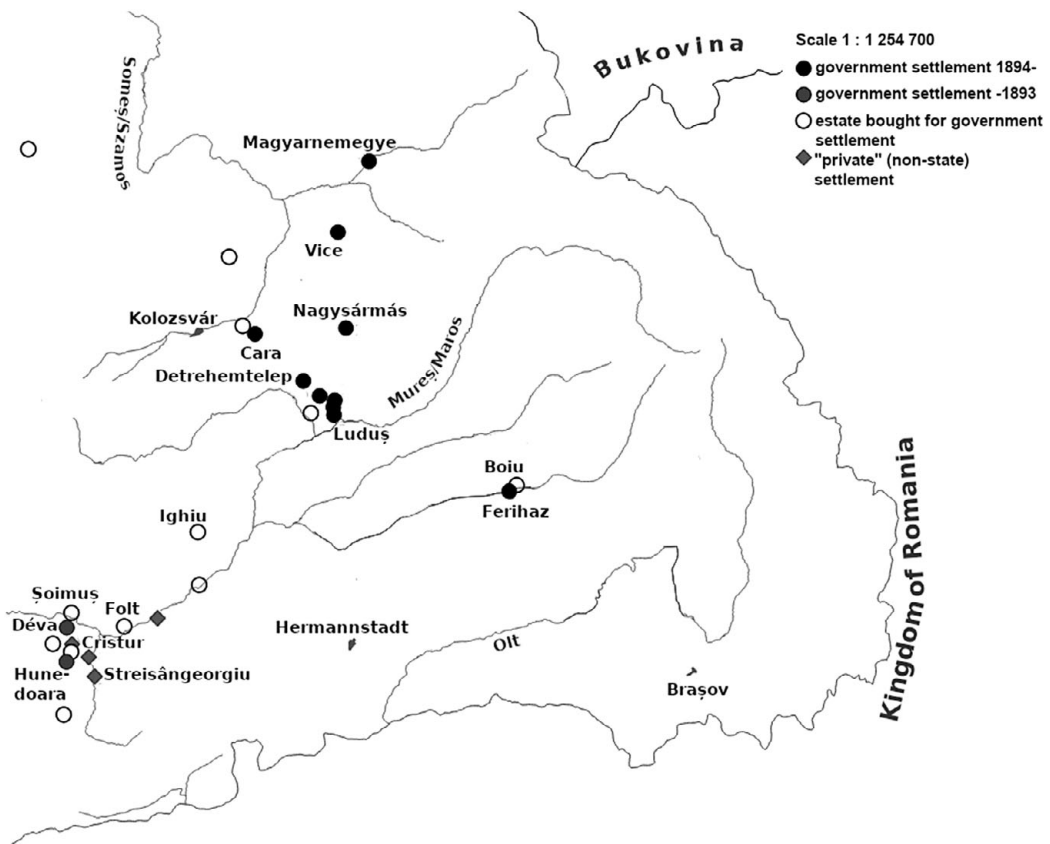
distant places and housed in closely spaced colonies in this Romanian-inhabited zone. The soil was tougher there than in the fertile open plains to the west, which drainage operations since the 18th century had transformed into a breadbasket. But new colonies were also established scattered in the open plains, amidst an ethnolinguistic patchwork (Map 1). The settlers of Újszentes (Vadászerdő), founded in 1891 on deforested land, came from as far as 120 kilometers to the northwest as the crow flies (Bodor 1907).

Although emphasizing that Magyars were not newcomers to the Banat from a historical point of view, the men behind the settlement program saw them as pioneers, islands in a sea of aliens. Hungarian/Magyar historical narratives resented the fact that the Habsburgs had left out Hungarian-speaking peasants from repopulating the province in the 18th century, even if the new settlements were rarely explicitly presented as an attempt to redress this bias. In Transylvania, the other main arena of internal colonization, nationalists could fall back on the imagery of the

“language frontier,” familiar from Prussia and Cisleithania (the Austrian half of Austria-Hungary). Harking back to military strategy and color-coded ethnic maps, they pointed to “hubs,” “outposts,” and “links” of Magyardom, where colonists were supposedly deployed to strengthen the native Magyars against their Romanian and Saxon neighbors.

This language proved highly flexible in practice, not the least because the long-term goal consisted of connecting the Hungarian-speaking Szeklerland with the Magyar settlement area of the central Hungarian Plain.⁶ This goal was as vague as it was ambitious, marking out a corridor at least 200 kilometers long and, by contemporary implications, up to 100 kilometers wide. Because the Ministry owned no suitable land in Transylvania, it had little choice but to colonize lands available on the market, which it bought up from 1893 onward (Lovas 1908, 210). As a rule, it chose sites near existing Magyar communities, including two majority Magyar villages, Vice/Vița and Magyararnemegye/Nimigea Ungurească in northeastern Transylvania (Map 2).

In both provinces, the colonists were expected to act as ferment of a loosely defined “Magyarization.” This included the acquisition of Hungarian and a sense of Hungarian patriotism. In addition, the colonies were intended as model settlements that would impress the native population with higher standards of prosperity and hygiene (Csernovics 1913, 164–166). Conversely, there was also the expectation that the colonists would prove their superiority by out-competing their new neighbors, for example by leasing surplus land. Finally, some involved believed that the colonists could assimilate the locals in the foreseeable future, even if they were in the minority. For Diodor Csernovics, the manager of the treasury’s Arad domains, the village of Nevrincea in the upper Bega Valley seemed an ideal place for a new colony because he speculated



Map 2. New and enlarged settlements in Transylvania.



Map 3. Locator map showing the relative locations of the Banat (to the West) and Transylvania (to the East).

that the local Greek Catholic Romanians could “get absorbed more freely into the Roman Catholic Magyars, whose religious ceremony differs from theirs only in the liturgical language.”⁷ In reality, the Greek Catholic rite shared the liturgy of the Orthodox Church, which made these two Romanian denominations very similar in the eyes of peasants.

Act V of 1894 established state control over colonization activities but failed to regulate nonstate (“private”) settlement. Of the 17 such ventures I have identified over the next 20 years, only two took place with ministerial approval, and the Ministry usually learned of them only after the fact, if at all. Some of them may have flown under the radar deliberately to circumvent the requirements that the law placed on the colonizing landowner or because the settlers were not Magyars. It is often hard to decide from whom the initiative came, but some such settlements must have involved serious logistical operations. Imrefalva, for example (the name commemorates either the landlord or an official who supported the settlement), was populated from three Slovak-speaking localities in present-day Slovakia, Southeastern Hungary, and the Serbian Banat (Dobokay 1896, 881). Other ventures went unnoticed because—contrary to the paternalistic assumptions that underlaid the law—they were grassroots affairs without colonizing landowners. An example of a grassroots settlement is Elisabethheim, founded in 1907 in the Banat plain by German-speaking flood victims from the side of the Danube, who remained leaseholders of their land until the 1920s (Klein 1986).

The law created a government settlement fund with a starting capital of three million crowns to finance land purchases and infrastructure works. A Department of Colonization was established in the Ministry of Agriculture to coordinate settlement activities, manage future colonies, and search for and acquire private land for sale. It was initially headed by Lajos Dobokay and from 1898 by Sándor Lovas. As the program built up momentum in Transylvania, the Department opened an office in the city of Kolozsvár/Cluj in 1904.⁸ Most speakers in the parliament found the budget insufficient, especially in comparison to the corresponding Prussian settlement fund, which

amounted to 119 million crowns. Government representatives agreed but presented it as only a first step. But while opposition parties and the agrarian lobby pushed for an expansion of the program, there were also skeptical voices. At a major conference organized by the Ministry in 1900, several participants questioned whether Hungary could ever afford the prohibitive costs of the Prussian experiment, whose efficiency they doubted. They also pointed out the limits that Hungary's geography placed on a plan to spread the Magyar element. The Magyars generally inhabited the fertile midlands, and their lifestyle, the pessimists concluded, could not adapt indefinitely to the more inhospitable soil and climate of the peripheries.⁹ Although this idea resonates with the then-fashionable environmental determinism, settlers transplanted over large distances actually struggled to adapt their agricultural techniques.

The Hungarian government settlement program differed from its Prussian model in not only its smaller scale but also its frugality. State settlers in Hungary were required to pay back the price of their farms and become owners, unlike in Prussia where this was only an option. Credit-lending schemes enabled needier German speakers to participate in the Prussian program, whereas the Hungarian ministry expected applicants to possess 2,000–3,000 crowns in cash or assets (a typical applicant could earn 200 crowns a month in the summer and 60 in the winter as an agricultural worker) (Széchenyi 1893, 31–33; *A magyar kormány 1898. évi működéséről ...*, 1899). Most Hungarian colonies were attached to existing settlements and typically consisted of fewer than 150 households, the threshold for independent locality status.

During Ignác Darányi's first term as minister between 1895 and 1903, the Department established three colonies in Temes County in the Banat plain and added three more colonies, or 163 homesteads, to the settlements along the Bega. The settlers came from today's southern Hungary, western Slovakia, and the land-poor old colonies of the western Banat. Between 1900 (when the treasury started disbursing the settlement fund) and 1904, the Department acquired 15,768 yokes, most scattered across neighboring Transylvania, and settled these acquisitions with colonists.¹⁰ Among the new Transylvanian colonies, Detrehemtelep and the hamlets off Cara/Kara resembled local land-parceling projects in that their inhabitants were recruited mainly from nearby villages. Four colonies north of Luduş/Marosludas were notable for hosting an assortment of colonists from Transylvania, the Bukovina, Western Hungary, the Banat, and today's western Slovakia, whereas Feriház/Fehéregyháza (today Albeşti) had a twofold symbolic significance for the colonizers, as the place of the Hungarian national poet Sándor Petöfi's death and because a few years earlier a Transylvanian Saxon bank had settled Saxons in the village (Egry 2005, 161, 167) (Map 2).

2. The Relationship between Settlers and the Ministry

As described, Hungarian settlers had to buy their farms in yearly installments from the third year onward. The repayment period was fifty years, just as in Prussia, although some early contracts set shorter periods. Thus, the last annuities were to expire in 1963 (Csernovics 1913, 116–117). The interest rate varied between 2% and 4%. The government reserved the right of first refusal and redemption in the early decades, and the farm remained entailed, following the Prussian model (Eddie 2009, 46); it could not be subdivided or merged with another farm, leased, or mortgaged without the Ministry's prior consent, and its tenancy could only be transferred to the next of kin. The law fixed the size of the plots at 10 to 80 yokes, but it typically amounted to 20. In most places, the plots were allotted by lot. Although the plots were the same size, they differed in their distance from the village core and in the productivity of their land, which created inequalities between settlers from the outset.¹¹ Following Prussian practice, there were also homesteads with small plots, reserved for a category of people the Ministry called "workers": wage laborers or artisans who did not meet the property requirements for farm-holding settlers (Kennedy 2019, 79).

Within two years, the new settlers had to build their farm buildings, dig a well, erect a fence, plant an orchard and vegetable garden, and plant trees in front of their house. Colonist settlements were exempt from land tax for three or six years (depending on their size), and the government did not

levy school and nursery taxes (Lovas 1908, 21). Apart from the work the treasury carried out on all its estates (like dredging riverbeds or ameliorating the soil), the Department took care of building and furnishing the local school, kindergarten, and church (they did not mix Catholic and Protestant settlers), as well as quarters for the priest, village secretary, or doctor where population growth warranted it. It undertook the related maintenance and repair work; drilled artesian wells; built bridges; paved the roads; distributed breeding animals, seed allotments, and seedlings to the settlers on credit; trained them in crafts such as beekeeping and basket weaving; and promoted cooperatives among them.

Aside from public works, the personal affairs of the settlers took up most of the Department's energy. Upon arrival, the settlers came under the civil jurisdiction of the local government and sent members to the local council, but they stood apart from the old population both physically and socially, fell under ministerial authority in matters of property rights, and lived under the constant supervision of resident colony overseers. The Department did not interfere with the affairs of settlers who paid on time but collected information on those who defaulted on their payments or reclaimed their farms after taking up work outside the settlement. The information about farming, behavior, and drinking habits, as well as the biases of overseers, then fed into Department Head Lovas's judgment as to whether the settler was responsible for his plight or deserved leniency. Even if the buyer or tenant was a Magyar or colonist, Lovas checked whether the purchase and lease contracts contained current market prices and fair terms, which he took as a sign that the parties were acting in good faith.

3. Recruiting Settlers

The Ministry struggled at once with too many and too few applicants. Whereas his predecessor had spoken of 20,000 land-seekers in 1894, Minister Darányi proudly announced in 1900 that he had allocated two orders of magnitude fewer new homesteads in the Bega Valley despite the previous lack of interest (*Képviselőházi napló 1892–97*, 15:344).¹² The archival files show a rush of applicants around 1894, when the program received much publicity. In those years, apparently impostors posing as recruiters roamed the Hungarian Grand Plain collecting subscriptions from landless peasants under fraudulent promises.¹³ People applied to their county authorities and, after 1911, to the National Association of Hungarian Land Credit Institutions—unofficially called the Altruist Bank. These vetted each applicant through local representatives of the state, assessed their assets and abilities, and ensured that they were god-fearing, sober, and obedient.

To the Department's chagrin, however, most applicants were rather poorly off. Smallholders with fortunes of 2,000 crowns or more, the kind of peasants the Department wanted to recruit, preferred to increase their land where they lived, and the land subdivision then in full swing in the Hungarian Grand Plain even diverted poorer peasants from resettlement projects far away. The Ministry briefly lowered its expectations and accepted colonists with less than 2,000 crowns in some early settlements (Lovas 1908, 79, 103, 177, 185). It later blamed these people for some of the hardships they faced in their new homes.

Moreover, the applicants were interested in the fertile plains of the Banat, and few wanted to be resettled in distant Transylvania or, as news of the dire conditions spread through family networks and returnees, in the less fertile upper Bega Valley. (Peasants around Szeged in present-day southeastern Hungary soon tweaked the name of Krassó-Szörény County to “Krassó-Szögény,” where *szögény* is the local pronunciation of *szegény* “poor” [Ecseri 1899, 15].) At the height of enthusiasm for the project, the Ministry canvassed the counties of the Grand Plain with the most land-hungry peasants to colonize Nagysármás/Sârmaşu in central Transylvania but with little result.¹⁴ Eventually they struck a deal with a group from Western Hungary, and they even walked their deputies around the site. However, of the 184 registering families only 120 showed up in Nagysármás, and these immediately began to drift home so that by 1906 only 58 of them lived there (Soós 1987, 369–375). Their place was then filled from the surrounding counties. The earlier

debacle was repeated in 1898, when the Ministry was again unable to recruit Magyar colonists from the Grand Plain for Transylvanian Magyar Nemzege and Vice (Lovas 1908, 214–215).

With no credit system in place for indigent applicants, they were usually told that they could not be considered. The era's smug, liberal paternalism was on full show in the Altruist Bank's response to an applicant unable to pay the required quarter of the property value up front. The bank functionary assured him that one or two bad harvests would ruin settlers without the necessary means, showed him which large estates near his home hired labor, and even drew his attention to a nearby sugar factory.¹⁵

The fact that political circles made the internal colonization of Magyars a national issue ratcheted up the expectations of privately colonized settlers or aspiring settlers, who sometimes asked the minister for loans, intervention with their bank, or resettlement to treasury estates. The Ministry handled such requests with great restraint, careful not to encourage financially unsustainable settlement projects.¹⁶ In 1894, Count Ábrahám Gyürky lured 150 families mainly from the Szeged area with the promise of dividing his Banat estate among them. When they arrived, however, he only installed them in the worse half of his estate and later seized their harvest. The press depicted in dramatic brushstrokes the misery of the starving colonists trapped in cramped stables. After the issue arose in parliament, Minister Darányi determined that the matter was a private settlement and distributed aid to the colonists. But he refused to receive them on treasury property as they demanded. Instead, he negotiated with the count, who eventually resettled them in a neighboring village.¹⁷ In later years, the Ministry took over the administration of at least one privately colonized settlement according to the colonizing landowner's last will, initially for 20 years.¹⁸

Describing the Austrian Südmark Society's colonization of St. Egydi/Sv. Ilj in South Styria with Germans, Pieter Judson stresses that the activists overestimated the national commitment of the colonists they resettled (2006, 100–103, 118–120). The same applies to the Hungarian settlement program, although the politicians who midwived it also insisted that the settlers should be under the guidance of a reliable rural intelligentsia and educated in a national spirit. It is clear that the settlers did not shape their new lives as hard-boiled "guardians of the nation." The settlers of Szapáryfalva seem to have hired Romanian lawyers, and not even the pastor cared about the latter's "antipatriotic" reputation ("A délvideki magyar telepítvényesek," *Pesti Napló*, August 31, 1893, evening edition, 1). Disaffected with the helping hand of the Hungarian state, Bukovina Szeklers would spread socialist literature and attend Serb Radical rallies. Many new Banat colonists deserted their plots in search of work, and Lovas was alarmed at signs that some Igazfalva Magyars were allying themselves with Romanian "agitators" against the treasury (Lovas 1908, 80; László 2005, 119–120).¹⁹ On the other hand, many a petitioner to the Ministry seem to have adopted the nationalist clichés of the time when claiming that higher interests justified their move to the Banat or when, already there and in debt, describing their plight as "mournful despair in the sea of Wallachians."²⁰ Insofar as applicants sincerely expressed patriotic feelings, however, these could also indicate sympathies for the Independentist opposition, as the officials later discovered to their detriment.

Although the treasury had still resettled Banat Germans ("Swabians"), Slovaks, and Catholic Banat Bulgarians in the 1880s, these fell out of favor in the next decade. As early as 1894, Department Head Dobokay asked for a report on the signatories of a collective petition to find out, among other things, whether all of them were Magyars.²¹ Petitioners with German or Slovak first language were often, but by no means always, rejected on the explicit grounds that "the colonization of Magyars is primarily sought."²² The long-established Eastern Christian population rarely applied for vacant plots and received them only in exceptional cases.

Because of their superior agricultural skills, thriftiness, and alleged willingness to assimilate, the head of the Hungarian statistical office still recommended peasants from the German Empire as the best settlers in 1877 (Keleti 1877, 50–52). The idea of accepting colonists from Germany could already seem far-fetched to most contemporaries and, more importantly, interest in

southeastern migration had also died out in the German lands (one single applicant, a young man called Max Öttinger from Stuttgart appears in the files).²³ However, Banat Swabians, many of whom lived on treasury estates, had been the most sought-after settler reserve until the 1880s, and their search for land in more eastern parts of the Banat continued unabated thereafter. Several speakers at the 1900 conference advocated mixing them with Magyar settlers in new colonies.²⁴ According to Treasury Estate Manager Csernovics, their inclusion was all the more advisable because resentment at their neglect could “drive them into the Pan-German camp.”²⁵ The Department had still populated German-speakers on a large scale to Fejértelep/Sanddorf/Šušara (now in Serbia) around 1896. Later, however, Lovas rejected most applicants with German names and home language, although he was careful to add in 1910 that these rejections were free of political considerations.²⁶

Roma applicants were excluded, among other reasons, because they did not meet the property requirements and were thought to lack experience in agriculture. In 1912, Roma from a Romanian village in the Eastern Banat and, in 1913, 200 Roma from a Serb village in the Southern Banat applied. Remarkably, the former won the support of the county sheriff (*alispán*), whereas the local authorities vouched for the honesty and serious intentions of the latter and the Ministry of the Interior intervened on their behalf—to no avail. Apart from the fact that no settlement was underway, Lovas decided that “the Gypsy question cannot be solved within the framework of Articles V of 1894 and XV of 1911 because both laws presuppose that the persons to be admitted must possess personal property and the material means for successful farming.”²⁷

Only a small fraction of the applications from the later period ended up in the Ministry, making it difficult to assess the number and origin of the applicants. Two trends nevertheless stand out. First, Hungary had established itself as the main migratory destination for the high-fecundity Szekler villages in the Bukovina. Priests and schoolteachers probably helped to keep alive the mystique of the remote homeland and compensate for the tragic stories of previous migrants. The Catholic Saint Ladislaus Society in Hungary trained Bukovina Szekler priests and schoolteachers and sent copies of its Hungarian calendar to all Szekler families in the Bukovina (Sántha 1942, 95–99). The calendar for 1912, for instance, praised one of the Szekler villages on the Lower Danube as a beautiful and prosperous model settlement (Sebestyén 1972, 47). On the other hand, the families in government-administered settlements also had many children—five to six and often eight to ten. Their population growth pressed for the continuation of the colonization program, and the last colonies of the Bega Valley were populated mainly with people from earlier ones.²⁸

4. Problems on the Ground

Many colonists saw their hopes dashed, especially those who had sold their plots in distant regions in exchange for a larger homestead in the Banat or Transylvania. By 1900, settlers in all new Banat colonies had considerable backlogs and the colonies did not quite represent Magyardom in the radiant light their creators wished.²⁹ They only survived because for every settler family that left its plot there were new candidates trying their luck.

Children of the first Bodófalva settlers later recalled that their parents had come expecting to get rich in what they imagined as “little America,” only to be sorely disappointed. Drinking foul water made them sick, and the meadows teemed with vipers (Magyari 1993, 25–26). Many of the new settlements were plagued by regular flooding, and there were also challenges of the Ministry’s own making, which insisted on keeping costs low. The freshly cleared land in the Banat was full of stumps and bushes, which the Ministry expected settlers to clear while building their houses to a prescribed, impressive size (at least 17 × 8 × 4 meters). As a result, they lived in huts for years until they had pulled out enough stumps—a job they were untrained for—to sow their crops (Ecseri 1899, 21; Bodor 1907, 3). The Department learned from this fiasco, and from the mid-1890s onward mostly took care of the houses, tree stumps, and undergrowth. But this also did not go off without

teething problems. In Nagysármás, the construction costs were miscalculated and only a third of the houses were completed in the first year, which caused many of the first settlers to return to Western Hungary (Soós 1987, 375).

Even in Újszentes, the new settlement that according to contemporaries was the most successful, thirty-one of the original 133 settlers went bankrupt in the first 15 years (Bodor 1907, 7). The worst off were the settlers who had to adapt to unfamiliar natural conditions—the case along the upper stretch of the Bega. After eight years, the settlers of Szapáryfalva complained that they had reaped only poor harvests, and fluctuation was high (*Emlékirat a Krassó-Szörény vármegyébe kebelezett Szapáryfalva magyar református telepköztség jelen viszonyairól*, 1889, 3; “A délvidéki magyar telepítvényesek,” *Pesti Napló*, August 31, 1893, evening edition, 1). In Făget/Facsád, 42 of the initial ninety farmers gave up their struggle with the elements and quit in the first 10 years, and another 30 were put into receivership.³⁰ For a book celebrating the achievements of internal colonization, Lovas devoted considerable space in his *The Latest State Settlements in Hungary* (1908) to what he saw as mismanagement by incompetent, careless, or outright depraved settlers (Lovas 1908, 78–81, 87, 105–107, and passim).

In Transylvania, Detrehemtelep seems to have met the expectations of the settlers moving there from the next village (Murádin 2004, 43). On the other hand, the colonies attached to Magyar-nemgye and Vice in northeastern Transylvania were unmitigated failures. The Ministry bought some of the worst farmland at an inflated price and did not provide sufficient pasture. To make matters worse, neither formed one contiguous mass but the plots were scattered into smaller patches. Such an arrangement was common in Transylvania, but in a planned colony it was a self-inflicted blow. Local agents of the Department reported abandoned houses and a depressed mood among the settlers, and a county administrator told of once-prosperous peasants who had moved there from the Bukovina only to lose all their wealth in their new home.³¹ Lovas and his subordinates hoped that land consolidation would alleviate the problems, but this plan met with fierce opposition from the locals.

A series of bad years up to 1914 dealt another blow to the new agricultural colonies, driving their inhabitants to the brink of bankruptcy.³² The settlement overseers reported a sense of despair from everywhere. The declaration of the war found all the colonists of Nagysármás in debt, and many were sued by the treasury for their arrears.³³ In the Bega Valley, the Department was even forced to hand out wheat for the bread of the grain-producing settlers of Igazfalva and Făget.³⁴

The knee-jerk response of the Department personnel was to blame the settlers for their “unreasonable” (*okszzerűtlen*) cultivation methods, such as sowing wheat after wheat, which was feasible in their native lands but depleted weaker soils. As a remedy, they thought about setting up model farms and agricultural schools where settlers would learn best practices, but no more than a couple of such institutions came into being.³⁵ Only on the leased-out lands of the treasury did the Department prescribe that the settlers should fertilize the soil and alternate crops. Independent experts agreed that they were not quite up to the task, especially when they had to contend with new soils and a new climate. But the experts also questioned the wisdom of market-oriented cereal farming on family holdings, which the Department still envisioned as the basis of the settlers’ livelihood (Leopold 1917, 84).³⁶ Natural conditions did not favor cereal production in the upper Bega Valley, where only the alluvial soils on the riverbanks were productive without deep ploughing. On the settlers’ hard forest soil, grain cultivation required larger farms that could afford the necessary equipment.³⁷ Lovas wrote about his efforts to diversify the economy around the city of Temesvár/Temeswar/Timișoara by picking settlers skilled in dairy farming and horticulture (Lovas 1908, 159, 165). But ironically, intensive dairy production only took off in Újszentes, an early colony north of the city where the government had forgotten to allocate grazing land (Bodor 1907, 5–6). All the colonies the government had established in the Banat since 1894 housed less than one cow per family. With the exception of Fejértelep, endowed with extensive vineyards, the colonists depended on grain.³⁸

5. Reactions of the Native Population

Because the treasury estates that the government set aside for the settlers were by no means unused lands, the surrounding village communities had a lot to lose in the process. Sometimes they felt that colonization was an insult because they coveted the same fields or pastures. The stakes were even higher in the upper Bega Valley, where a whole string of Romanian villages lay on treasury land and lived off it. They had leased their communal pastures from the treasury for as long as anyone could remember. In addition, the land deforested and earmarked for settlement purposes in the 1880s and 90s allowed them to scale up their livestock farming in the intervening two decades. The reallocation of land for settlers then deprived them of both, destroying the very basis of their livelihood. Moreover, the government also redrew the administrative boundaries of the affected communes, forcing them to offset the lost local taxes that the treasury had formerly paid for its lands and to levy higher taxes on their citizens.³⁹ Thus, colonization appeared as a zero-sum game between old and new inhabitants.

The Ministry claimed to compensate the old communities, but it shortchanged them. After annexing 1,824 yokes of treasury land from livestock-raising Răchita to the newly independent Igazfalva, leaving the former only 23 yokes of communal pasture, the Ministry considered 133 yokes (from the boundary of a third village) a sufficient compensation.⁴⁰ And for their losses of administrative territory, Lovas granted three communes a compensation of a paltry 10 crowns per yoke.⁴¹ During Darányi's second term, the Ministry openly excluded Romanian and nonsettler bidders when auctioning the lease of some nearby lands.⁴² This series of slights fomented resentment in the locals that a pioneer of Hungarian sociography described as ominous based on first-hand experience (Braun 1908, 22–23).

However, with the possible exception of the period between 1906 and 1910, senior county officials in the Banat defended the endangered old communities and twice stopped colonization. Károly Pogány, the high sheriff (*főispán*) of Krassó-Szörény County, called on the government to put an end to its internal colonization project in 1900.⁴³ After the Romanian Uniate bishop intervened with him the following year, Pogány reached an agreement with the Ministry stating that “the settlement action must not be aggressive—that is, it must not jeopardize the survival of local communities.”⁴⁴ In 1903, he convinced Darányi to drop a new settlement plan out of consideration for the Romanian population.⁴⁵ As a result, resettlement activities in the upper Bega region were suspended until the coalition government resumed them in 1906. In 1910, Pogány's second successor in office demanded just compensation for the Romanians of Hezeriș, “so poor that they cannot support themselves without help from the treasury.”⁴⁶ As will be shown, the high sheriff of Temes County intervened the same year to bring colonization to a halt.

The attitude of high sheriffs in a matter widely promoted as a national project is significant because, as government officials, they also represented Hungarian state nationalism to the locals in other respects. They voiced a concern that the settlement program would anger the people and underlined this with economic arguments. Pogány praised the strides made by the traditional cattle breeding of the Romanian majority along the Bega, leaving implicit the contrast with the precarious economy of the new state colonies.⁴⁷

The local Magyar elites had their own economic and political interests that worked against the program. The landowners in the areas where the colonists were recruited could imagine that colonization served their interests but their peers in the target areas not so much. Another participant in the 1900 conference who opposed further colonization was Count Róbert Zselénszky, a large landowner in Temes County and former MP for the ultranationalist National Party. He argued that the Banat had run out of free land by 1850 at the latest, at least presupposing the preservation of *latifundia*.⁴⁸ Ironically, landowners in areas where the surrounding population lived off livestock often hired farmhands and harvesters from great distances to grow grain or other crops, and migrant workers were thus essential for the smooth running of large estates in the Banat. Their presence, however, could hardly remind the locals that parceling out large estates was a possible

solution to their problems, whereas the presence of colonists did just that. No longer fearing harvest strikes in the Grand Plain, even the largest land-owning interest organization had cautiously backed out of the government program in 1903 (Rubinek 1904, 908–909).

In 1889, eight years after moving from the floods of the Danube to Krassó-Szörény County, the Calvinist Magyars of Szapáryfalva gave a detailed account of how the district administrator made their lives hell by trying to install a system of surveillance and denunciation (*Emlékirat ...*, 1889). It is not entirely unlikely that he ruled over the other exclusively Romanian villages under his authority with similar methods and found it urgent to suppress the Magyar newcomers exactly out of fear that they were more capable of standing up against him and spreading a spirit of resistance.

But regardless of their despotism or lack thereof, county authorities had to align their politics with the government, which expected them to deliver electoral victories. This was especially true for the non-Magyar peripheries, on the whole the safest electoral bastion for the ruling Liberals.⁴⁹ It turned out that the colonists the government kept sending from Central Hungary tended to support pro-independence opposition parties. Contrary to what the ubiquitous ethnicized framing of the question might suggest, this deficiency alone gave county officials reason enough not to rejoice at their arrival.

Rather surprisingly, the archives and the press reported few violent incidents between old residents and state colonists. Only in the small village of Ceișoara in southern Bihar (far north of the Banat) did the locals, Hungarian papers claimed, set fire to the crops of 10 recently immigrated, Hungarian-speaking families, and six Romanian youths from Nagysármás beat up a group of Szeklers according to a Romanian daily (Ady 1987, 176; “Coloniștii sēcui și Români,” *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, March, 11–24, 1903, 3). But the same Romanian newspaper also reported the murder of a colonist by other colonists in the same village (“Bătaie cu moarte,” *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, September 1–14, 1910, 3). On the other hand, the colonists predictably began to integrate into their new environment, and the fact that many of them relied on side jobs or casual labor to survive increased cultural contact. The Magyars of Újszentes (in convenient proximity of the city of Temesvár) made a handsome profit from the hundreds of children that the surrounding Germans, Serbs, and Romanians sent to them to learn Hungarian (Lovas 1908, 155; Weber and Petri 1981, 336–337; Băran 2009, 45). Department head Lovas also noted with satisfaction that the Western Hungarian colonists and the Romanians from Nagysármás had started to learn each other’s language, local Romanians had quickly taught the Magyars of Igazfalva “gentler ways of tending to the cattle” (1908, 89), and just as quickly they had learned from them how to harvest with a scythe and bake bread. Lovas hoped that the colonists would also copy the maize cultivation and fruit growing of their Romanian neighbors (89–90, 197).

This is not to say that enmity between old and new residents was not widespread. In some places, their relationship began glacial and showed no signs of thawing. At the 1900 conference, the Roman Catholic bishop and one of his clergymen urged the government to reconsider its settlement plans in Rekasch/Rekaš, as they would alienate the “patriotic,” German- and South-Slavic-speaking Catholic wine growers badly hit by the recent phylloxera plague.⁵⁰ Their warnings came true. The locals, who wanted the treasury estates to be parceled out among the needy, obstructed colonization as best they could (Lovas 1908, 118–119). The same happened in Moșnița. In both places, the colonists reacted to the anger of their new neighbors by applying for administrative independence but fell short of the required 150 households (117).⁵¹ In the latter village, the Romanians also filed another request to the same effect (172–173). Significantly, Hungarian-speaking natives of the same religion as the settlers were not necessarily more welcoming toward them. The locals drove several settler families away from Magyarnemegy by threatening them with arson, and in Vice they would not even let them cross their fields while under snow cover (217–218). In Ghioroc, “native” Roman Catholic Magyars still had reservations about marrying Bukovina Szeklers around 2000 (Colta 2005, 113).

6. The Coalition Years (1905–1910)

Darányi was leader of one of the opposition parties in the coalition that came to power in 1906 and became minister of agriculture for a second term. He started to step up internal colonization, his pet project, with more robust political support and a settlement fund that he hoped to gradually expand to Prussian levels. After a three-year pause, the settlement on the Bega entered its second phase with the creation of 256 households in four colonies. But the main focus was now on Transylvania. From the 1,900,000 crowns provided by the Ministry of Finances, Darányi bought the same amount of land during 1907–1909 as in his first term, all in Transylvania and the neighboring Szilágy County.⁵² The new purchases seem to reflect the contingencies of what the county high sheriffs put forward (possibly as personal favors to bankrupt landowners) rather than strategic considerations.⁵³ Five new properties were in the imaginary corridor connecting the Szeklerland with the Hungarian Grand Plain, but seven were outside of it in southwestern Transylvania. On closer inspection, several of these new acquisitions also proved unsuitable for the intended purpose. The estates of Folt and Boiu/Bún were located in floodplains, the latter in several parts, with space for 30 to 35 homesteads.⁵⁴ The Ighiu/Magyarigen estate was scattered within a perimeter of 19 kilometers, five-sixths of it forests and mountain pastures at an altitude of 600 to 1,300 meters and the balance vineyards.⁵⁵ The one in Şoimuş/Marossolymos came in two pieces several kilometers apart and turned out to be much smaller than is recorded in the land register.⁵⁶

One of Darányi's short-term goals was to resettle the remaining Bukovina Szeklers to Transylvania. He assigned them the new acquisitions in Hunyad County in southwestern Transylvania, in his words, to enclose the county seat of Déva in a "strong Magyar belt."⁵⁷ Darányi and the county high sheriff sought to take advantage of Catholic Bukovinans' high birthrate and assumed that together with the indigenous Calvinists, many of whom spoke obsolescent Hungarian, they would form a phalanx to offset the Romanian majority.⁵⁸ The coalition government allocated one million crowns to this project but only had time to add a second colony to Déva, the single colony it established in Transylvania. After the coalition lost power, an Independentist MP tried to save the project as a private enterprise. He lured Szeklers from the Bukovina and the Lower Danube to Hunyad County, who found a new home in two villages, Cristur/Csernakeresztúr and Streisăngeorgiu/Sztrigyszentgyörgy (László 2005, 122–130).

Darányi discovered another, wealthier demographic reservoir that he hoped to tap. After agrarian activist and long-time advocate of internal colonization István Bernát outlined the idea in a memorandum in 1906, the Ministry unfolded larger-than-life plans to settle returnees from overseas ("primarily Magyars") in the fertile plains of the Banat. For a start, a 661-yoke piece of treasury land was staked out and advertised in the United States. The plan was not entirely ill-advised, considering that peasants often emigrated overseas to collect money for buying a farm and returned upon learning that land was being parceled out in their hometowns.⁵⁹ But the prospect of resettlement in the Banat met with little interest from Magyar overseas migrants, and in 1909 the estate was rededicated to domestic applicants.⁶⁰

Although "saving the gentry" had been a popular catch phrase for some time and several participants at the 1900 conference advocated propping up midsize properties or even resettling landowners, the idea of "land protection" came to the fore in Transylvania in the 1900s (Károlyi 1900).⁶¹ The Magyar share of land ownership everywhere far exceeded the Magyar share of population. When the (Magyar) noble estates fell victim to the collapse of grain prices, land-hungry local (mostly Romanian) peasant communities were able to obtain cheap loans from Romanian ethnic banks to buy them. Drawing on anticapitalist and Social Darwinist tropes and the German discourse on Polish credit cooperatives in Prussia, Magyar authors portrayed this process as a scheme by ethnic banks to offer Magyar landowners mortgages on favorable terms and then rob them of their inheritance, interpreted here as national wealth. Instead of Magyar peasants, allegedly prone to discarding their language and religion, this topos identified the noble landowners as the true bulwarks of Magyarism and made their private interests an urgent national problem.

Keeping the old gentry in possession of their land was then presented as the key to keeping Transylvania Hungarian—although, in reality, the change of land ownership did not entail any population movement and the former tenants very often became owners.⁶²

Avoiding Magyar-to-Romanian or Magyar-to-Saxon sales became a guiding principle for the Department. When Magyar buyers came forward for an estate in which the Department was not interested, the personnel asked the owner to auction it off as a whole or in parts, whichever seemed more favorable.⁶³ Significantly, in the only new land purchase by the Department whose behind-the-scenes negotiations survived, the bankrupt owner increased the bid by invoking the imminent danger of his estate falling into the “hostile hands” of a Romanian bidder.⁶⁴

Darányi drafted two bills in 1903 and 1909 to expand the Ministry’s internal colonization program and marry it with the protection of Magyar landownership. Neither of these bills made it to the plenary of parliament, both times because the government fell. In the more comprehensive and detailed 1909 bill,⁶⁵ the settlement fund was to be increased to 120 million over a 12-year period (§ 122). The bill empowered the Ministry to bid at any land auction without forfeiture (§ 333). Although it did not create a credit system for the poor, it did open up the program to former landowners who could produce a diploma from an agricultural academy (§ 25). To accommodate them, “medium-sized estates” of no more than 500 yokes were to be created (one for every 1800 yokes, § 10), and residents were also included in the program (§ 1). All this would have enabled the Ministry to buy up bankrupt gentry property, give part to the former owners, and settle the rest with Magyar colonists subordinated to them.

7. New Priorities (1910–1914)

The coalition broke up before the bill could be debated in the parliament, and the king appointed a Liberal Party statesman to form a government in early 1910. As was customary in the period, the new government then called elections to achieve a parliamentary majority. At this juncture, Sándor Joannovich, the freshly appointed high sheriff of Temes County, made the government reconsider its stance on internal colonization. Two months before the upcoming elections, he asked the new minister of agriculture to stop the ongoing settlement work in his county. He spoke partly for the surrounding villages that had been excluded from leasing treasury lands and pointed out the adverse political repercussions. At the time, the Ministry had ensured that their holdings qualified colonists to vote in parliamentary elections after their tax exemption expired. With less than 10% of the citizenry enfranchised, even a few thousand colonists meant a big boost for the Magyar vote. This strategy, Joannovich noted, had come home to roost for the Hungarian parties adhering to the constitutional system of 1867. The districts of the Hungarian Grand Plain from which many settlers came were among the most Independentist-leaning, and settlers became the pillars of the party in all three counties of the Banat for several cycles.⁶⁶ The following month, Joannovich gave details of the various colonies and the ringleaders who canvassed for the Independentists and “terrorized” pro-government voters. More disturbing still, the Szeklers of the Lower Danube supported a Serb candidate.⁶⁷ The settlement drive was briefly interrupted but then resumed, right at election time, and Joannovich felt it urgent to repeat his warnings again, this time in no uncertain terms: “the settlement is an enormous political setback for some constituencies and, if it continues, will wipe out the possibility of the ruling party’s candidates being elected.”⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Treasury Estate Manager Csernovics put the Ministry on alert about the antigovernment tendencies of the Rekasch settlers who had leased treasury lands on preferential terms.⁶⁹ He terminated their contract after the election on the pretext that they had not fertilized the lands and had not cultivated in rotation.⁷⁰ Complaints against the settlers’ political involvement were not limited to the Banat. In Transylvania, the high sheriff instructed the Department personnel to keep the Detrehemtelep colonists away from the Independentist electoral caucus.⁷¹

Settlement activities came to a standstill in both provinces. They were resumed only after the war, but by then they were already serving the opposite agenda of the new Romanian regime. Apart from

concerns about spreading out opposition voters, István Tisza's new policy to placate the Romanian national movement also contributed to its being put on hold (Gratz 1934, 2:280). Romanian activists' protests against the settlement reached a peak around 1910 when its advance exacerbated an already delicate situation in the upper Bega region. In their petition to the king at the opening of new parliament, national minority deputies stressed that "the blessings of the resettlement campaign must also be granted to the non-Magyar population" (Kemény 1952–2019, 5:346). In the autumn, the memorandum written by a Romanian activist at Tisza's request also stated that the law on internal colonization had to be amended to grant locals the right of first refusal (Ioan Mihu to István Tisza; Kemény 1952–2019, 5:365).

The actual amendment to the law on internal colonization, Act XV of 1911, was modest in scope. It adopted the extension of plot size from Darányi's bill to include midsize estates. Its central point was the creation of the Altruist Bank (National Association of Hungarian Land Credit Institutions) —to execute "land divisions, settlements and other land policy measures" (§ 1). The Tisza administration effectively put the issue on the back burner.⁷² Even if the settlement program had continued, the Altruist Bank would not have enabled the needy to participate, as it advanced only three-quarters of the land price.

Although the coalition government linked internal colonization and the cause of Magyar landownership, Tisza's government suspended the former in favor of the latter. In the first five years, the Altruist Bank granted loans of more than eight million crowns to 158 landowners from Transylvania and Szilágy County (out of 296 applicants) and purchased 28 properties worth 4.7 million crowns (Kenéz 1917, 147–148). Meanwhile, the future of the properties acquired during 1907–1909 was uncertain and they were leased to locals.⁷³ The Department's men bid at land auctions and bought smaller properties, mainly to avoid sales to Romanians, but they also negotiated with potential buyers.⁷⁴ Settlement plans continued on a smaller scale but with constantly delayed schedules and changing destinations. A group of applicants who filed a request for land in Moșnița in 1908 were first earmarked for Sudriaș and a few years later for Răchita, both in the upper Bega Valley. But it seems that by 1913, the Altruist Bank had abandoned its plans for the Bega Valley and was considering settling in Szilágy County instead.⁷⁵

Conclusions

In 1913, 8,194 people lived in the government colonies established since 1894 in the Banat and 3,730 in Transylvania.⁷⁶ Winding back time and taking 1885 as the turning point, as Romanian legislation later did, increases their numbers to 16,500 (Szász 1921, 7). The number of participants was higher due to fluctuation, but the scale of the Hungarian operation still pales in comparison to the 80,000–100,000 German colonists in Poznan and West Prussia in the same year (or 180,000 if one counts tenants) even though it far outstrips the closest Cisleithanian parallel, the settlement program of the Súdmark Society (Baier 1980, 86). At the same time, settling a settler cost the Prussian Settlement Commission an order of magnitude more than the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture. Whereas the former spent 935 million marks, the equivalent of 1,110 million crowns, on land purchases (giving 6,200–14,000 crowns/settler), the Hungarians bought the Transylvanian lands they later colonized for two million (540 crowns/settler). Moreover, the Hungarian program was essentially designed to break even, as the Hungarian ministry expected to recoup this and other expenses from its settlers (Baier 1980, 86).

Although 62% of the Poznanian and West Prussian settlers came from outside the two provinces, the Prussian action could not even offset the effects of ethnic Germans' westward out-migration and low birthrate (Baier 1980). In the case of Hungary, about half of the settlers came from outside the territory annexed to Romania after the First World War (including the Bukovina). Their numbers were too small to have a real influence on the demographic of Transylvania as a whole. Even in Hunyad County, the three government and two "private" colonies accounted for less than 6% of the statistical increase in Magyars over the last 40 years of Hungarian sovereignty. In Temes County it

was 13% and in Krassó-Szörény County 36%, all colonies together. The contribution of the Magyar colonies seems to be considerable in the latter, but they were clustered along the two banks of the Bega River.

The history of the Prussian and Hungarian colonies converged with the Versailles peace treaties, but the latter has proved to be much longer and continues to the present day. Both interwar Poland and Romania cracked down on settlers, seen as demographic pawns of the previous, rival nationalizing regimes. Polish laws denied citizenship to Germans who had settled under the 1908 Prussian Expropriation Act, gave the authorities the right to evict the majority of settlers who did not own their land or could not prove their property rights, and made land inheritance more difficult (Baier 1980, 339–340). All this triggered a massive exodus to Germany, with 57% of the settlers leaving by 1926 (Heidelck 1934, 24–25). Romanian politicians also disputed that the Magyar colonists were owners of the unredeemed land, but their status was more solid. In the end, Romania resorted to a less-drastic measure and expropriated land in excess of five or seven yokes in the colonies founded after 1885.⁷⁷ As a result, settlers from the already struggling upper Bega colonies flocked toward industrial centers or emigrated to Brazil and Hungary (Ménessy and Hangay 1942, 220). But apart from the two failed settlements in Transylvania, now quickly dissolving, the demographic decline was nowhere near as sharp as in Prussia. Elsewhere in the Banat and Transylvania, population numbers progressed more or less in line with the surrounding population. Nor did the settlers replace their language, as the leftist critic of the program Oszkár Jászi predicted, at least not until the latest generations (Jászi 1912, 470).

From the government's perspective, then, a comparison with the paradigmatic Prussian settlement program yields mixed results. Partly for reasons beyond its control, the parsimonious and bumbling Hungarian campaign created more durable colonies. The Hungarian program also cost far less than its better-funded Prussian counterpart, but it was considerably smaller.

Although the department in charge was dedicated to the cause, several factors prevented the program from expanding to the size that newspaper audiences were led to believe was possible, connecting the Szekler enclave with the Hungarian lowlands and creating a dense network of Magyar villages in the Banat. Mismanagement was rife, and nepotism likely influenced land purchases, but these factors played only a minor role. More ominously, the settlement plan often seemed to run counter to economic reason. This was most spectacularly the case in the Bega Valley, where the cattle breeding of the old Romanian population flourished while the Magyar settlers, unaccustomed to the climatic conditions, practiced a kind of grain cultivation that yielded little. Colonization went more smoothly and encountered fewer difficulties where the settlers were transferred from short distances.

The ecological distance between the recruitment areas in Central Hungary and the target areas in the peripheries resulted in another obstacle—namely the shortage of applicants. Local land divisions diverted the land-hungry Magyar peasants of the Hungarian Grand Plain, who were unlikely to share the nationalist ethos of the government settlement program, and news of the misery of earlier settlers cooled their interest. Grassroots settlement migration continued, but it involved people too needy to be eligible for the program and it always moved to the fertile Banat plains. Eventually, the architects of the program felt compelled to lower the threshold for participation several times, as did their Prussian counterparts, who first relaxed their preference for Protestant settlers and later even allowed German participants from majority-Polish areas (Eddie 2009, 63).

A look at the government budgets also suggests that, for all its upbeat communication on the issue, the Hungarian government gave its settlement program a lower priority than did Prussia, except during the coalition period. Although the responsible ministerial department purchased land to be colonized, the government continuously financed its deficit by selling treasury estates. Most land purchases for colonization fell in the 1900s, but even then, they were outstripped six or sevenfold by revenues from land sales (*Révai Nagy Lexikona* 1911–1935, 1:392). After the turn of the century, leading circles also changed their minds about the best strategy for securing the territory for

the nation. The defensive rhetoric of the Transylvanian landowner lobby imposed the view that Magyar land ownership was just as important as shifting the ethnic balance, whereas the large landowners of Central Hungary backed out of the settlement program once the government suppressed harvest strikes and the parliament passed repressive labor laws. Interest in “land protection” ultimately outweighed internal colonization.

Local representatives of the government voiced various political concerns about the new settlements. One of the stated goals of the settlement project was to advance the political integration of national minorities, whereas in reality it was likely to turn them against official state nationalism. High-ranking county officials had to consider the hostility of the locals and sought to soften the tensions, a concern that only became more pressing as Romanian minority activists were poised to gain clout in Hungarian political life. The final straw against the program, however, was the pro-opposition militancy of Magyar settlers in the 1910 elections. Because the pool of possible settlers was concentrated in some of the most opposition-voting areas, the settlement program had the unintended consequence of spreading out the voter base of the opposition parties. This realization gave the new government the decisive impetus to freeze the program eight years before the dismemberment of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Disclosure. None.

Notes

- 1 A reported 86.16% among non-Magyars, who made up 55.28% of the population in Hungary without Croatia (Országos Magyar Kir. Statisztikai Hivatal, 1891, 115*, 134*).
- 2 The most comprehensive treatment (Szabó 1987) only follows the sources until 1894, the year the program kicked off.
- 3 Dezső Gromon, May 23, 1883, K184-1891-36-80409, Hungarian National Archives, Budapest (hereafter cited as MNL-OL).
- 4 A telepítés s az azzal kapcsolatos kérdések ügyében a M. Kir. Földmivelsügyi Ministeriumban Darányi Ignác m. kir. földmivelsügyi minister elnökle alatt 1900 január 18–23. napjain tartott szakértekezlet jegyzőkönyve, 1900, 71, 351–352, Budapest.
- 5 A telepítés, 1900, 6–7.
- 6 Beksics 1896, 9; Sebess 1905, 45–46; the future minister of agriculture Béla Tallián in A telepítés, 1900, 265.
- 7 Csernovics to Darányi, December 7, 1906, MNL-OL K184-1906-36-89103.
- 8 MNL-OL K178-1904-1920.
- 9 A telepítés, 1900, 141, 182, 211, 255, 272.
- 10 MNL-OL K178-1904-1920.
- 11 A telepítés, 1900, 19, 148.
- 12 A telepítés, 1900, 7.
- 13 A telepítés, 1900, 33.
- 14 A telepítés, 1900, 33.
- 15 The Altruista Bank to József Ságbi in Torontáltorda, May 25, 1914, MNL-OL K184-1914-36-73496.
- 16 MNL-OL K184-1894-36-17369; K184-1894-36-15890; K184-1912-36-5760.
- 17 Viktor Molnár to Darányi, July 21, 1896, MNL-OL K178-1896-1409; “Nyomorban élő telepesek,” *Pesti Hírlap*, October 26, 1895, 12; Magyar Kir. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1912, 846.
- 18 Deseőháza (Arad County) with the adjoining estate. MNL-OL K27, government meeting of August 19, 1900, 72–76.
- 19 Settlement Overseer Károly Zatkalik, January 2, 1906, MNL-OL K184-1906-36-14593.

- 20 József Magyar and 53 others from Pusztaföldvár, 1894, MNL-OL K184-1894-36-45362; Károly Ilia and 44 others from Tápé, July 8, 1906, Timiș County Directorate of the National Archives of Romania, Fond Prefectura Județului Severin 38/1906, 1; Lázár Gyórfi and others, November 11, 1912, MNL-OL K184-1912-36-5760.
- 21 MNL-OL K184-1894-36-15308.
- 22 For example, MNL-OL K184-1894-36-17524.
- 23 He was promptly rejected as a foreign citizen; MNL-OL K184-1914-36-36603.
- 24 A telepítés, 1900, 72, 194, 284, 331.
- 25 Diodor Csernovics, June 23, 1909, MNL-OL K184-1910-36-99, 184 and Arad, August 1, 1910, MNL-OL K184-1910-36-60376.
- 26 MNL-OL K184-1910-36-60376.
- 27 MNL-OL K184-1914-36-37145.
- 28 Sándor Joannovich, October 17, 1913, MNL-OL K184-1914-36-35430.
- 29 A telepítés. 1900, 79.
- 30 The chief clerk of Krassó-Szörény County, April 6, 1914, MNL-OL K184-1914-36-39522.
- 31 László Czirjék, district administrator of Násăud, January 20, 1910, MNL-OL K184-1911-36-13396.
- 32 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-2, 343; K184-1913-36-29, 580; K184-1914-36-35591.
- 33 MNL-OL K184-1914-36-39765.
- 34 Győző Jánosy, September 22, 1914, MNL-OL K184-1914-36-122890; K184-1914-36-35838.
- 35 MNL-OL K184-1911-36-13, 396; K184-1914-36-60, 515; K184-1914-36-122377.
- 36 A telepítés, 1900, 311.
- 37 Lajos Ecseri in A telepítés, 1900, 24; cf. Ménessy and Hangay, 1942, “Făget: falutanulmány,” *Magyar Kisebbség* 21:211–212.
- 38 MNL-OL K184-1914-36-37080.
- 39 The mayor and the village secretary, September 25, 1909, MNL-OL K184-1913-36-102493. On local taxes in Dualist Hungary, Buday 1913.
- 40 Boundary perambulation of July 30 to August 1, 1898, MNL-OL K184-1900-36-13890.
- 41 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-106, 998; K184-1913-36-8355.
- 42 Diodor Csernovics to Béla Serényi, July 30, 1910, MNL-OL K178-1910-7265.
- 43 A telepítés, 1900, 198.
- 44 MNL-OL K184-1902-36-50829.
- 45 In Breazova. Károly Pogány to Darányi, January 4, 1903, MNL-OL K178-1903-169.
- 46 Zoltán Medve to Béla Serényi, April 27, 1910, MNL-OL K184-1913-36-107824.
- 47 Károly Pogány to Darányi, January 4, 1903, MNL-OL K178-1903-169.
- 48 A telepítés, 1900, 135–142.
- 49 On systemic electoral malpractice in Dualist Hungary, see Gerő (1997, 57–105) and Seton-Watson (1911).
- 50 A telepítés, 1900, 70, 325.
- 51 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-28631.
- 52 MNL-OL K27, government meeting of April 25, 1907, 26–27, government meeting of September 27, 1907, 84–102, K184-1911-36-48222.
- 53 Lipót Bornemisza to Darányi, May 25, 1907, MNL-OL K184-1907-36-21497, under K184-1914-36-38984; Árpád Kemény to Darányi, April 13, 1908, MNL-OL K184-1909-33907. Cf. MNL-OL K184-1908-36-22407; K184-1908-36-36201.
- 54 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-107518; K27 government meeting of May 25, 1911, 19–20.
- 55 Surveyor Pál Faragó, May 2, 1913, MNL-OL K184-1913-36-29419.
- 56 MNL-OL K184-1911-36-13, 423; K184-1910-36-61360.
- 57 MNL-OL K27, government meeting of September 27, 1907, 94, K184-1907-36-21497, under K184-1914-36-38984.

- 58 MNL-OL K27, government meeting of September 27, 1907, 94, K184-1907-36-21497, under K184-1914-36-38984; Lipót Bornemisza to Darányi, May 25, 1907, MNL-OL K184-1907-36-21497.
- 59 Törvényjavaslat a telepítésről, az ingatlanfeldarabolásról és egyéb birtokpolitikai intézkedésekről, 1909.
- 60 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-29579.
- 61 A telepítés, 1900, 10–11, 101, 176, 181, 213.
- 62 On the problems of interpreting the Romanian ethnic bank system in Dualist Hungary, see Egrý (2006, 4–34).
- 63 MNL-OL K184-1908-36-36, 678; K184-1908-36-37476.
- 64 Árpád Kemény's letters and telegrams to Darányi and Imre Tervey, correspondence between Bálint Kiss and Kemény, MNL-OL K184-1909-33907.
- 65 Törvényjavaslat a telepítésről, 1909.
- 66 Sándor Joannovich to Béla Serényi, April 3, 1910, MNL-OL K178-1910-5061.
- 67 Apart from the populist, democratic platform of the locally well-established Serb Radicals, they also ran in alliance with Gyula Justh's Independentist party. However, few Szeklers had the right to vote in the area. Sándor Joannovich to Béla Serényi, May 11, 1910 (confidential), MNL-OL K178-1910-4153. See also the reports of district administrator Béla Török, January 22, 1904, National Archives of Romania (Bucharest), Cancelaria CC al PCR, Arhiva CC al PCR, fondul 50, Documente elaborate de organele represive 6,667 (inv. 3,016), 79–88 and of settlement overseer Károly Zatkalik, January 2, 1906, MNL-OL K184-1906-36-14593.
- 68 Sándor Joannovich to Béla Serényi, June 10, 1910, MNL-OL K178-1910-5061.
- 69 Diodor Csernovics, May 12, 1910, and May 18, 1910, MNL-OL K178-1910-7265.
- 70 Diodor Csernovics to Béla Serényi, July 30, 1910, MNL-OL K178-1910-7265.
- 71 István Szász's coded telegram to Béla Serényi, MNL-OL K178-1910-3968.
- 72 MNL-OL K178-1909-7285.
- 73 MNL-OL K184-1912-36-8967.
- 74 MNL-OL K27, government meeting of January 11, 1913, 69; government meeting of May 25, 1911, 19–20, K184-1913-36-84397; K184-1914-36-35983; K184-1913-36-106854; K184-1913-36-45765; K184-1913-36-84835; K184-1914-36-35966.
- 75 MNL-OL K184-1913-36-44592; K184-1913-36-29922; K184-1914-36-37437.
- 76 MNL-OL K184-1914-36-39, 765; K184-1914-36-37080.
- 77 Szász 1921, 7; "Nicolae Titulescu's Speech in the League of Nations," September 5, 1925, *Magyar Kisebbség* 4 (1925): 734–43.

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