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Franz Sz. Horváth. *Zwischen Ablehnung und Anpassung: Politische Strategien der ungarischen Minderheitselite in Rumänien 1931-1940.* Studia Hungarica Series. Munich: Verlag Ungarisches Institut, 2007. 446 pp. EUR 50 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-929906-63-9.

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Political Strategies of the Hungarian Minority in Interwar Romania

Works on Hungarian minorities in Western languages are rare and most fail to overcome the burdens of the past, especially with respect to an unbiased narration, free from nationalist views on history.[1] In general, the Hungarian minorities are either presented as being innocent victims of an oppressive nationalist policy (normally by scholars of Hungarian origin) or as the fifth-column of Hungary in neighboring countries (normally by scholars of Slovak or Romanian origin).[2] Franz Sz. Horváth's book on political strategies of the Hungarian minority's elite in interwar Romania is, therefore, a book that aims to fill a gap in Western academic literature.

The study focuses on two groups of potential readers: specialists in Transylvanian history and scholars concentrating on minority issues in East Central Europe. Horváth, therefore, gives a broad introduction of the topic and its specific research problems. While research on German minority groups focuses mainly on the question whether they supported revisionism and played the role of an irredenta, he states that the political discourse of a minority elite in the 1930s cannot be reduced to the perception of Fascist ideology and the question of revisionism.[3] Furthermore, he even claims that revisionism is a problematic category for analysis as it does not reveal anything about the evolution and diversity of political ideas among leading activists of a minority.

In the first chapter, the author presents his leading questions and the primary sources he consulted. His corpus of sources is very impressive and enables him to draw a representative picture of the Hungarian minority elite. Besides studying some twenty-five periodicals, he used unpublished sources in three Romanian and eight Hungarian archives. In the second chapter, he focuses on the theoretical problems concerning the notions of the nation, the nation-state, and national minorities in East Central Europe. In the third chapter, Horváth describes how Transylvania was incorporated into the Romanian state and its political system.

The fourth chapter deals with the political strategies of the Hungarian minority from 1918 to 1930. It focuses on the formation of the Hungarian People's Party (Országos Magyar Párt) in 1922, which united the Hungarian elite despite ideological or confessional differences. Nevertheless, as Romanian politicians were not interested in cooperating with the Hungarians, the unification of the "national forces" did not lead to any concrete political results. As a consequence, the elite became more and more frustrated but did not yet look for alternative ways to organize.

The following chapter on the years 1931-33 is a turning point in the book. While the first hundred pages form a fluent narration, the reading becomes more demanding in this chapter. Now the author mainly strings together compilations of primary sources translated into German. Nevertheless, Horváth gives a broad picture of the heterogeneity of the political thinking of Hungarians in Romania. He pays particular attention to the activities of the young generation that founded new organiza-

tions since the old conservative elite still dominated existing structures. Other interesting debates that the author takes up concern the relations between Hungarian-speaking Jews and the German minority.

The sixth chapter continues the analysis for the period of the national-liberal government in Romania from 1934 to 1937. After the rise of National Socialism in Germany, the "Jewish question" became more controversial and the idea of excluding Jews from Hungarian organizations became more popular. This also led to a change in relations with the German minority in Romania. As some Transylvanian Saxons actively supported Nazi ideology, democratically orientated Hungarian politicians distanced themselves from these representatives of the German ethnic group. Another dividing point was the demonstrative recognition of the Romanian borders by leading Saxons in 1934. Nevertheless, Horváth points out that the changes in Romania cannot be monocausally linked to Adolf Hitler and Germany. The internal political developments within Hungary and Romania should also be considered as an explanation of the inner and outer radicalization of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

The seventh chapter concentrates on the years 1938-40, the period of King Carol's dictatorship. From an organizational point of view, it started with a deep rupture as Carol dissolved all political parties, among them the Hungarian People's Party. This led to political discussions and personal intrigues about how to organize a new representation for the Hungarian minority. Once the old structure did not exist anymore, ideological and personal differences, which had been put aside in the name of national unity, produced new dynamics. It is remarkable that the Romanian government not only destroyed the old organization but also decided who should be the leader of its successor, the Hungarian National Community. At the same time, especially after the Munich agreement and the First Vienna Award of November 1938, many Hungarian politicians were no longer interested in solutions within Romania as they were more and more convinced that Transylvania would belong to Hungary in the future. They already started secretly thinking of solutions to Transylvania's economic and social problems as if it were a part of Hungary. They also made suggestions about where the new borders should be drawn to avoid further struggles between Hungary and Romania over the region. This included debates on a bilateral population exchange to disentangle ethnically mixed regions.

These discourses were marginal however, in comparison to the "Jewish question." As Hungary had already introduced laws that discriminated against Jews, this question was becoming more urgent. Members of the Hungarian elite who were opposed to anti-Semitism faced a very difficult situation. They had to choose between an anti-Semitic Hungary and a Romania discriminating them. In this situation, many perceived the discrimination of the Hungarian-speaking Jews as the lesser evil. Another problem for the democratically oriented politicians was the realization that democracy, as they had experienced it over the last twenty years, did not offer them any advantages because the ethnic minority was denied active participation in state affairs. This experience made them less resistant to authoritarian solutions presented by the governments of Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Miklós Horthy.

Despite his critical remarks in the introduction, Horváth uses the category of revisionism in his conclusion. He divides the political thinking of the Hungarian minority in the interwar period into different stages of revisionism. Around 1927 it became a utopian desire, around 1933 a hope, and finally a belief in 1938. He interprets the changes in 1927 as a consequence of the official articulation of revisionist claims by the Hungarian government in response to Lord Rothermere's campaign for Hungary in the *Daily Mail*.[4] He considers the negative experience with Romanian politicians who never accepted Hungarians as equal partners as being less important. The same can be said of the shift in 1933, which Horváth mainly interprets as a reaction to Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the strengthened belief in a new international order. Changes in Germany also led to a radicalization of political life in Romania, especially in rhetoric against national minorities. The Munich agreement in 1938 was the final turning point which led to a widespread belief that the Hungarians of Romania would be the next ethnic group to profit from border revision.

To sum up, Horváth's book is an innovative study on minority problems in East Central Europe. But long passages, especially in chapters 5 to 7, are mainly translations of Hungarian primary sources into German. This can be justified by the inability of many Western scholars to read Hungarian. This goal of the study–to present Hungarian sources in a Western language–is underlined by an appendix of seven key documents translated into German.

Horváth's translation of Hungarian documents into a Western language gives scholars focusing on other mi-

norities in East Central Europe a chance to compare their findings with Horváth's. It would be of particular interest to focus on the question of the political organization of minorities. Horváth seems to assume that the minority situation demanded national unity. One could argue, however, that the Germans in Czechoslovakia had various political parties until they were united by Konrad Henlein in the late 1930s. The newest work on the German minority in Poland also focuses on aspects of inner diversity, mainly based on geographical differences.[5] Horváth could have dealt with this aspect in more detail as there were differences and rivalries between the Hungarian elites from the Banat and from Transylvania. Further research on political organizations of minority groups in East Central Europe should also take a closer look at the role of the electoral system and political culture of a given state in explaining political strategies of minorities.[6] In the Hungaro-Romanian case, this could lead to a better understanding of the possibilities of Hungarian-German cooperation or the formation of a regionalist pressure group consisting of all ethnic groups in Transylvania against the political elite of the Regat, the areas of pre-1918 Romania.

Despite these reservations, Horváth's book will be an essential part of the continuing debate on minorities in East Central Europe. Concerning Transylvanian history, the work will be a standard monograph on the Hungarian minority in Romania for years if not for decades.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Lászlo Révész, *Minderheitenschicksal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Donaumonarchie: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der magyarischen Minderheit*, Ethnos 37 (Vienna: Brumüller, 1990); and Sándor Bíró, *The Nationalities Problem in Transylvania 1867-1940: A Social History of the Romanian Minority under Hungarian Rule, 1867-1918, and of the Hungarian Minority under Romanian Rule, 1918-194*0, Atlantic Studies on Society in Change 66 (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1992).

[2]. Ladislav Deák, *Hungary's Game for Slovakia: Slovakia in Hungarian Politics in the Years 1933-1939* (Bratislava: Veda, 1996); and Ioan Scurtu, "The Evolution of Romania in the Inter-War Period: The Status of National Minorities (1918-1939)," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 39 (2000): 189-202.

[3]. See, for example, Mariana Hausleitner, ed., *Der Einfluss von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Wissenschaftliche Reihe 107 (Munich: IKGS-Verlag, 2006); and Rudolf Jaworski, *Vorposten oder Minderheit? Der sudetendeutsche Volkstumskampf in den Beziehungen zwischen der Weimarer Republik und der CSR* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1977).

[4]. See Ignác Romsics, "Hungary's Place in the Sun: A British Newspaper Article and Its Hungarian Repercussions," www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/confhung.htm.

[5]. Winson Chu, "The Geography of Germanness: Recentering German History in Interwar Poland," *GHI Bulletin* 42 (2008): 95-104. I hope that Chu's full-length thesis will be available in print soon.

[6]. This aspect is also missing in Zsuzsanna Török, "Planning the National Minority: Strategies of the Journal Hitel in Romania, 1935-1944," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7 (2001): 57-74.

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