

Abstract of a PhD thesis

The History of the Mountain-region Action between 1897–1910

Braun László

Consultant: Dr. Szilágyi Zsolt

University of Debrecen

Doctoral School of History and Ethnology

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I. The aim of the thesis and the outline of the topic

As a result of the modernization of agriculture the rural society and agricultural production became open. Applying machinery, taking into account the needs of the market, rational farming and providing the growing need of big cities for food products have changed the role of agriculture in the economy while the society itself has also changed. More and more contact points appeared between the agriculture and industry that became bigger and stronger and the development of the rural relations became a cornerstone of the development of economy, even if the situation differed from region to region.

Agriculture, nevertheless, did not develop evenly, showing a continuously growing tendency everywhere. The formation of new economical relations lead among other things to ceasing the old, traditional relations. The population of some regions due to its geographical, economical, cultural and mental peculiarities reacted on the new economical relations either too late or not intensively enough while the old relations in most cases did not work any more. In the mountainous areas it was almost everywhere necessary to raise the economy to a higher level. Specialists in agriculture noticed this need at the end of the 19th century and in the 1890-s actions were taken.

The thesis deals with the programme carried out by the Hungarian government aimed at developing the economy of the mountainous areas at the turn of the 19th-20th century. The programme was worked out in order to provide better life-conditions for the local population, to join the economically underdeveloped areas to the more developed ones, to provide a solution for, if possible, those social problems that made a considerable part of the population leave their homes. It aimed to shape and develop farming in a way that it would be appropriate to local conditions trying to adjust the mountainous regions to the modern tendencies of the age.

The mountain-region action started in 1887 and it is described in the thesis till 1910. The economical programme finished only at the end of World War I similarly to the economical and political unity of the Carpathian Basin that ceased to exist after the Great War. However, a few years before World War I ended, less attention was paid to the action in the Northern-Carpathian mountains that was partly the result of similar economical programmes started in other mountain regions on the territory of the ancient Hungary. During the years of World War I due to the more and more difficult economical situation and life-conditions, the results of the events of the war that affected the area the mountain-region

action was confined to satisfying the food-provision of the population and giving different kinds of aid.

In the thesis I tried to reveal an element of the period of the dualism in order to throw better light on the mentality and the socio-economical ambitions at the the turn of the 19th-20th century. I aimed to describe the programme of the mountain-region action as clearly as possible in order to show besides its functions its basic principals as well.

The research examines, first of all, the results of the mountain-region action in four counties. The state aid programme started in the district of Szolyva, the county of Bereg and soon expanded on the whole county, then to other counties like Máramaros, Ugocsa and Ung. Almost all the villages in the mountain regions were involved into the action and moreover, even in part of the villages of the lowland areas credit associations were organized or machinery was provided to the associations of farmers. Later counties like Sáros, Szepes, Zemplén and Szatmár also participated in the state action but till 1910, i.e. in the examined period these four counties were involved to quite a little extent. The task of a baranch agency with a centre in Eperjes established in 1914 would have been to make the action more efficient in Sáros, Szepes and Zemplén, but the events of the war prevented it from being carried out.

As a result of social, economical and juridical frame the state programme could work only with certain restrictions. Nevertheless, in the given circumstances it was able to improve the economical situation in general. In order to show all this in my work in parallel with examining the local and economic history of the region from time to time I had to examine certain questions in a wider aspect, within the historical framework of the ancient Hungary. In addition, more aspects had to be taken into account in researching the events.

An intensive social phenomenon effecting the population of the region was the emigration that appeared – though on state level it was not the highest. The degree of the emigration pointed to those social, economical and of certain level national problems that piled up in the northern-eastern Carpathians in the last decades of the 19th century.

Some ecclesiastical points of view could not be omitted from the thesis as a greek-catholic bishop, Gyula Firczák, played an outstanding role in starting the programme. The realisation of the state programme was supported by greek-catholic priests as they were asked to do so in a circular by their bishop. The economical programme first of all aimed to help the greek-catholic ruthen population living in the mountainous areas though the leaders of the local Branch Agency of the Ministry found the expression 'ruthen action' a mistake and extended the programme for all the nationalities living in the area.

I made an attempt to describe the activity of the Mountain-region Branch Agency of the Ministry in economical unities. In my work I also tried to show that the effect of the complex state programme meant much more than exercising influence on the economical and financial life of the local population.

The thesis also shows how a deliberate and positive support of regional peculiarities serves the unity of different nations that becomes this way richer and stronger.

II. Printed and archive sources of the mountain-region action

The mountain-region action was an intention on modernization of farming of this region. Its model, as countrywide, was the Western-European agrarian development. In the mountain regions it was the Swiss model. The idea itself and perhaps for this reason the realization had partly been connected to Egán Ede. Egán announced his ideas about the development of farming in the mountain regions of Hungary and about the construction of modern alpine farming in a lecture held at Academy of Sciences of Hungary. The lecture was published in form of a book under the title *The economical calling of our Carpathians* in the same year. The economical expert in his writing gives such an elaborate plan of the possibilities of development and the directions of innovation that it was analysed in details in the thesis.

After Egán's death József Kazy, who followed him as a ministerial commission, carried on the programme began by Egán. Kazy's precise annual reports became fundamental to writing this thesis. Between 1902 to 1908, the years when he was responsible for running the programme, he wrote reports – sometimes summarizing several years - to the Ministry of Agriculture that were printed.

It was József Botlik who first drew attention to the theme of the thesis - the work of Mountain-region Branch Agency. In his books *Under a Triple Cross* and *Egestas Subcarpathica* he paid a particular attention to the person of Egán Ede and to the events of the mountain-region action.

His book *Under the Triple Cross* introduces the history of the Greek Catholic Church on the territory of the present-day Transcarpathia from the beginning, i.e. since the Ungvár Union was established in 1646 to the last decade before the end of the millenium (till the end of the 1990's). The author emphasizes the role of Gyula Firzák, the bishop of the church, whose contribution to the launch of the economical action was outstanding. At the same time Botlik considers that the greek-catholic priests played an important role in the action, as having been asked by their bishop the priests living in the mountain region, in parallel with other various activities, supported the action. In several cases the action had results due to their authority and organizing skills.

In Botlik's work about the life of greek-catholic church there is a detailed presentation of the beginning of the mountain region action. The first four years of the economic program, namely the period lead by Ede Egán, had been described in a more particular way. The author introduced the symposium held in Budapest with the participation of delegates from the four counties (Ung, Ugocsa, Bereg, Máramaros), presents the Memoranda, Egán's reports to the

minister of agricultural affairs, and the records of general assembly in Szolyva and in Munkács. The author paralelly writes about the activity of the Mountain-region Branch Agency in organizing the leasing of the lands, the distribution of animals, credit associations, stocks, shops and domestic industry. Botlik also deals with Egán's mysterious death. At that time it was established as an accident by the board of enquiry. With subsequent knowledge of the facts, Botlik considers that it was a murder. The thesis does not deal with the circumstances of the death, a question that is still disputable and stirs up emotions, only describes the event itself in a narrow way. It gives a short description of the incident only.

Another book of József Botlik related to Transcarpathia also includes description of the mountain region action and contents a lot of information about it. In this book he gives insight into certain aspects of the history of today's Transcarpathia from the era of dualism to 1944. He finishes his book by summarizing the most significant events of the soviet era and depicting the first decade of the Ukranian administration.

Part of his book, namely chapter two, the author dedicated to the mountain region action in which he gives more details than in his other writings. Beyond the circumstances of the first years and depicting the Egán's era he describes the events up to the end of WWI. Presenting the activity of József Kazy, the ministerial commission appointed after Egán's death, is given according to Kazy's written reports. Botlik in his work considers Kazy to be a worthy follower of Egán. A distinct part of the chapter deals with Kazy's last year as the head of the mountain region action and his report about year 1908 which was his last year in this position. Description of the activity of the local branch agency during the years of the Great War is interwoven with the description of the restoration of war damages and distribution of food supply to population as lack of food was caused by the war. The athour even notes in his work that in years of the war the Hungarian goverment had less and less possibilities to support the whole action. In his summary with reference to Apponyi's diplomatic note the author points out that in the territories adherent to Czechoslovakia and Romania the ruthen population was not suupported so well by the new states as it had been under the Hungarian goverment.

Gönci Andrea's work *Rusin Schismatic Movement at the Begining of XXth Century* portrays the impact of the religious change on the greco-catholic ruthen population of the region and its circumstances. Taking the description of circumstances caused by the social problems as a starting point, she describes the conversion of greco-catholic worshippers to the pravoslav church that had serious ideological as well as political background. The religious movment took place parallel to the mountain region action, so while describing the

economical state of the population the author also refers to the mountain-region action and to its results.

In describing the economical action Gönci mentions its main events, namely to leasing lands, distribution of animals, alpine grazing, establishing credit associations and to the off-license at the shops of the associations. In a short chapter she also introduces the activities carried out by the two leaders of the action Ede Egán and József Kazy.

Balaton Petra's book *The History of the Székely Action* describes the action of the Transilvanian Branch Agency established a few years later, in 1902. On developing an economical action parallel to the mountain-region action the results achieved in the Eastern-Carpathians had an effect, though the conditions in Székelyland had its own peculiarities that had to be taken into account at the very beginning of the programme. The two actions were in interaction with each other both in organizing the structure of the establishments and in realising the economical programme.

The book contains a short description of the mountain-region action as an antecedent of the Székely action. The author gives a precise description of the organisation of the economical actions in different mountain regions. The biggest part of the book is publishing the sources based on the data from the archives about the activity of the Székely Branch Agency.

Balaton Petra's work has become directive to the scientific description of the economic action.

The thesis is based on research in archives. I made an attempt to collect and compare the sources and the literature on the topic. The primary sources have been collected from the Transcarpathian Regional State Archive and the Hungarian National Archive.

Several fonds of the transcarpathian Regional Archive have been analysed. From the point of view of the topic, the most valuable data were found in the Mountain-region Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary. The most important from these are the reports of the leaders of the branches, the protocols of the meeting of the committee, the reports of the employees and the official correspondence. The documents of the greeco-catholic episcopate and the collection of the documents of the main overseers of Ung and Bereg counties are also connected with the topic.

From the documents of the National Archives of Hungary part of the general documents of the Archive of the Prime Minister's Office and of the Ministry of Agriculture were in the focus of attention. Having examined the materials of the archives valuable data have been found that contributed to the thesis. Among them was the *Memorandum* handed in and

compiled under the leadership of the greeco-catholic bishop Gyula Firczák, and the written report to the Ministry of Agriculture written by József Kazy, head of the branch in 1902. The materials of the two archives completed each other and made it possible to show the mountain region action not only in general but to reveal some of its details as well.

The contemporary newspapers followed the events of the mountain-region action. On the basis of the newspapers available in the Transcarpathian State Archive the thesis examines first of all, the effect of the discussions of the Members of Parliament from the four counties – Bereg, Máramaros, Ugocsa and Ung – on the beginning of the programme as well as the effect of the Memoranda. The events of the action were regularly dealt with in the newspapers though the beginning of the programme was followed in more details. Later, as the work of the branches became more natural, less attention was paid to it. From the examined newspapers *The Hungarian State* was a daily political paper of state level while the other four – *Kelet*, *Kárpáti Lapok*, *Munkács*, *Ungvári Közlöny* – were local papers. Among them the *Kelet*, the paper of the Hungarian greek-catholics paid the most attention to the events of the mountain region action by its frequent reports about it.

III. The main results of the thesis

The main guiding principals of the programme were laid in the very beginning by the first leader of the mountain-region action, Ede Egan, between 1897-1901. After his death the broadening and synchronization of the programme with the economical reforms of the country continued. It was possible to follow the action effecting several areas of economical and social life in all directions and put into shape in a proper way only till 1910.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first two chapters deal with the antecedents of the mountain-region action partly with those affecting the northern-eastern area during the period of modernization of the agriculture. One of these antecedents was the emancipation of serfs that created new economical and social situation. Its significance and results had strong/powerful effect on the political events of the era. The other antecedent that brought determinant changes into the life of the population of mountaneous areas was the forest law that came into force. The changes that in general seemed to be positive in case of a great number of farmers in the mountaneous areas resulted in a situation when the lands they owned and the number of animals they had became smaller, the farms ran into debts and the families became poor. They tried to find a way out of hopeless circumstances of life in migration.

The first chapter describes the events that as a result of the modernization of the agriculture determined the circumstances of life and farming opportunities of the population of the mountain regions during the second half of the 19th century.

A modern transformation of agriculture in Hungary began before the period of dualism. First of all, it was the emancipation of serfs that created a new economical and social situation. During the estimation of lands the farmers were not able to prove proprietary rights and the villages in several cases lost their pastures. In addition, the forest law of 1879 narrowed further the possibilities for farming. This law was of great significance from the point of view of flood prevention as cutting down the forests and their irresponsible use was impeded. That is why it were not the reforms that caused problems but rather their implementation as they were carried out without taking into account the local conditions and the interests of the population.

Ede Egan's plan for developing alpine farming is also presented in the first chapter as an antecedent of the mountain-region action. Within the frame of ancient Hungary his work was of great significance for the whole country as the plan – though in different degrees – touched upon more than half of the counties. Egan divided the counties in which alpine cattle-breeding could be carried out into three groups. He considered to be three counties as alpine

ones, in twenty there was a considerable number of pastures for alpine cattle-breeding and in twelve the proportion of such pastures was trifling. The underdeveloped farming conditions did not adjust to the circumstances but rather copied the farming traditions of the lowlands. During the mountain-region action, based on Egán Ede's work, an attempt was made to create suitable farming conditions for rural areas.

Settlement of noble-peasant lawsuit after liberation of serfs, unification of lands, redistribution of farm plots, the forest law resulting in lack of land and the population increase due to the high rate of birth made the population of the mountain area that was quite badly off even poorer. Shortage of land, poverty, high birth rate and low level of education appeared as a chain reaction and led to hopelessness, in numerous cases to an escape that people saw in emigration. The second chapter deals with the emigration movement that started in the northern-eastern counties in the 1880-es. The emigration of the end of the 19th century can be viewed in a certain form as a strong reaction on the social problems having appeared during the previous decades. The emigration that was really considerable in Zemplén county expanded to other counties: first to Ung then to Bereg and reached especially high rate in the previous one, i.e. in Ung. Relatively fewer people emigrated from Ugocsa – though it can be explained by the small size and the small number of population of the county while both in proportion and in number Máramaros was the county from which the smallest number of people emigrated. Nevertheless, the emigration from Máramaros had some special features. It became more intensive at the turn of the century and the target country for a number of emigrants was not the USA but Brasil, with its more uncertain economical relations.

The poverty of the region and the emigration related to it had been a significant phenomenon earlier, but it was the series of events in the northern-eastern Carpathians connected with the celebration of the millenium that drew attention to the region. The attempt to decrease the emigration by the government was an attempt to treat the symptoms of a social problem and the formation of a new type of mountain-region farming did not mean only superficial solution for those living in the area.

The third chapter deals with the proposal of the representatives of four counties - Bereg, Máramaros, Ugocsa and Ung – to the government that contained suggestion aimed at alleviating poverty and developing the area. The proposal later served as part of the basis for the economical programme of the mountain-region action. One of the initiators of the economical programme was Gyula Firczák, a greek-catholic bishop, who involved the priests of the greek-catholic church and supported the action till its end.

The fourth chapter deals with presenting Ede Egan's activity who, as an expert in agriculture, worked out part of the mountain-region farming and sought to apply foreign experience in Hungary. According to his plan, he wanted to tightly connect not only certain areas but the whole mountain region with the economy of Hungary. The northern-eastern Carpathians, being the poorest area of the country can be viewed as a starting point, to a certain extent as an experiment, but taking into account its success as well as an example in developing the mountain-region farming. Later, the Ministry of Agriculture proved this by opening new branch offices.

Improving life conditions of the population happened in three main directions: giving land to people through leasing lands, developing cattle-breeding and creating credit associations in order to reach economical independence.

The lands were leased from the Schönborn family estate through the government's mediation. The State Treasury leased more than 16 thousand cadaster acres (1 acre = 0,57 hectares) of land from the estate and rented it to local smallholders. This alleviated the need of the farmers in land to a considerable extent. Till 1910 about 7000 cadaster acres of land was bought by smallholders. Part of the lands was in care of the branch offices and was rented by the communities that used it as pasture. This form of rent was called tag. The utilization of alpine pastures through tagging meant that planned, profitable cattle-breeding was realised in the mountain region.

The state through the branch office took on a kind of mediating function between the estate and the farmers that was previously done by local tradesmen in case of smaller pieces of land but for a higher rent. It was not the income from the rent that the state counted on to have profit from but hoped to have bigger income for the whole area from the the production of *family* farms.

In order to improve the quality of the livestock pure-bred animals were distributed among the population and their proper feeding was provided by leasing the pastures. Considerable results were reached in cattle-breeding to which contributed the spreading of the stock brought from Tirol.

The fifth chapter gives a thorough overview of the mountain-region action in the period after Ede Egan's death: between 1901-1910. From the end of 1901 the Mountain-region Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture was directed by József Kazy and from autumn 1908 by Zsigmond Berzeviczy. They both were worthy successors of Ede Egan and under their leadership the action broadened. With the purpose of introducing modern and professional agriculture they organised model farms, where first of all young, local people had a possibility

to learn and to be trained. The branch of the ministry provided work in the lowland farms through employment service where the people living in the mountain regions got considerable sums of money. By organizing domestic industry in 1910 already 82 different works functioned giving job to almost 4000 farmers at winter courses. In order to modernize methods of farming special lectures on farming were held, machines and seeds were given to farmer with the purpose of having good harvest results.

Chapter six discusses the organization and functioning of the network of credit associations and the warehouses and shops connected to them which Ede Egán called 'the most effective' activity of the branches. They managed to build a special financial organisation that belonged to the system of the whole country but was able to adapt to the conditions of every individual village. For this reason, the first part gives an overview of the circumstances of the credits given to the agriculture in the whole country at the given period. As a result of the subsidy and of local cooperation the credit associations acted for farmer as a kind of benefit society with the help of which the smallholders made the most of their own potentialities and the subsidies meant for them much more than a simple donation.

By the end of the first decade of the XXth century the total turnover of the 82 storehouses was about 2 million crowns, the 136 credit associations lent more than 8 million crowns, to satisfy the needs of the population of the mountain region.

In the work of the Mountain-region Branch of the Ministry the most determinative factor was farming, but the whole programme since its presenting had a much more complicated attitude to changing the lifestandard of the population than a simple subsidy or leasing the lands. The cultural effects of the programme did not manifest itself though efforts in this area were also made during the realisation of the programme. The properly arranged economical circumstances themselves provided a calmer and more steady and civilised life in the mountain area. The participation of the greek-catholic priests in realisation of the programme was in accordance with the idea that in realisation of the programme the local intellectuals have to be relied on. In addition to spiritual leadership of the community the representatives of the church undertook practical guidance as well.

The mountain-region action included everybody who fell within the competence of it irrespective of religion and nationality and this meant without exception the poorer farming layers. In addition, after a few years the activity of the branches was expanded on the villages and smallholders of the lowland areas in the neighbourhood.

At the end of the 19th - beginning of the XXth century the mountain-region action on the one hand meant an aid programme affecting several areas of life that aimed to decrease

poverty, on the other hand recognizing the values of mountain-region farming provided better conditions for the economy of the Carpathian area.

IV. List of publications relates to the dissertation

Hungarian books (1)

1. **Braun, L.:** Hitelszövetkezetek a hegyvidéki kirendeltség keretében 1898–1910 között. /Credit associations within the mountain-region branch agency between 1898–1910/. PoliPrint Kft., Ungvár, 108 p., 2011. (Rákóczi-füzetek; 85.) ISBN: 9789662595109

Hungarian book chapters (1)

2. **Braun, L.:** Az 1879. évi erdőtörvény hatása az Északkeleti-Kárpátok lakosságára. /The impact of forest law on the population of the Eastern-Carpathian mountains./ In: Határtalan párbeszéd: [elektronikus dokumentum]: Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégiuma 2014. évi PhD-konferenciájának tanulmányaiból: Szeged, 2014. március 1. / Bajtalan Hunor, Bakó Edit, Bencsik Orsolya, Braun László, Demjén Izabella, Farkas Wellmann Endre, Hegedűs Norbert, Horváth Attila, Kiss Tímea, Kovács Áron, Máté Orsolya, Őszi Brigitta, Paládi Viktória, Palcsó Attila, Patócs László, Sikó Beáta, Tódor Imre, Tóth Lilla, Vrabél Tünde; szerk. Novák Anikó, Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium, Budapest, 215-226, 2014. ISBN: 9786155389283

Hungarian scientific articles in international journals (3)

3. **Braun, L.:** Az amerikai kivándorlás és Firczák Gyula szerepevállalása a Hegyvidéki akcióban. /The american emigration and Gyula Firczák's role in the mountain-region action/ *Acta Acad. Beregsasien.* 12 (2), 21-29, 2013. ISSN: 2310-1954.
4. **Braun, L.:** Kivándorlás vidékünkéről a XIX-XX század fordulóján. /Emigration from our region at the turn of the XIX-XXth century/. *Acta Hungarica.* 18, 303-314, 2007. ISSN: 9013-8104.
5. **Braun, L.:** Adalékok az 1880-1914 közötti Ung megyei kivándorláshoz. /Additions to the emigration processes from Ung county between 1880-1914/. *Acta Hungarica.* 15, 100-111, 2004. ISSN: 9013-8104.

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

6. **Braun, L.:** A hegyvidéki akció első évei Egán Ede irányítása alatt. /The first years of the mountain-region action under the leadership of Ede Egán/. *Új nézőpont.* 4 (2), 105-132, 2017. ISSN: 2064-7042.

Forthcoming publications:

1. **Braun, L.:** Firczák Gyula részvétele a hegyvidéki és az amerikai akcióban. A hegyvidéki akció kezdete és a görögkatolikus egyház támogató tevékenysége. /Participation of Gyula Firczák in the mountain-region and the american actions/In: Collectanae Athanasia. „...a Munkácsi Egyházmegye fejedelme...” Tanulmányok és források Firczák Gyula munkácsi püspök munkásságának megismeréséhez. Nyíregyháza, 2018. 91–105.

Conferences:

1. **Braun, L.:** Hitelszövetkezetek a hegyvidéki kirendeltség keretében. /Credit associations in the mountain-region branch of the Ministry of Agriculture./ Fiatal kárpátaljai magyar kutatók 4. konferenciája. Beregszász, 2006. október 28.
2. **Braun, L.:** A mezőgazdaság változása és a modern hegyvidéki gazdálkodás kiépítésének kísérlete. /Changes in the agriculture and the attempt to build a modern mountain-region farming/ Indivisibiliter ac Inseparabiliter. Feloszthatatlanul és elválaszthatatlanul. Tudományos konferencia a kiegyezés 150. évfordulója alkalmából. Beregszász, 2017. november 16.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

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