

THE HISTORY OF THE SZÉKELY ACTION, 1902-1914
The Role of the Government in the Development of Székelyföld
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After the Compromise in 1867 Hungary underwent a huge economical and social development. However not the whole area and population of the country was considering the general boom. Especially the peripheries characterized by poor natural sources and more archaic social organization suffered from lagging behind, which reached such a level in some decades that the handling of these problems needed the inevitable inference of the government.

The necessity of the economic, cultural and social development of Székelyföld was recognised by the Hungarian public at the end of the 19th century due to the mass emigration of the inhabitants of Transylvania, the "Székely-s" as well as their Romanian employment. The Székely debate became a permanent social problem at the turn of the centuries as a conclusion of the declining Székely economy, especially the stagnation of the manufacturing and sales, and the crisis of the conventional lifestyle.

The comprehensive and uniform development programme was precipitated from the 1870s by societies, from the 1890s by memoires – among them the first comprehensive suggestion booklet by the MPs in 1897 –, from the turn of the centuries by the almost 50 Székely societies organized all over the country. From 1904 the collective organization of these social movements was the Alliance of the Székely Societies based in Marosvásárhely, founded by middleclass intelligentsia principally those with national feelings, not being satisfied with the politics of the government about the nationalities.

The self-organization and movement in the society existed in the public life – in spite of its being ignored – until the World War: the Székely congresses and conferences held almost every year worked on the status of the economy and culture of Székelyföld-Transylvania. The most important of these congresses was the one held in 1902 in Tusnád, its proposals were summed up in a collection of motions for the comprehensive development of the area, serving as well as the verification of the fact, that the Székely debate is a national problem that requires governmental and social organization and co-operation.

Between 1896-1910 the so called Székely-lobby evolved in the circle of the supportive politicians of the Székely debate, independent from their political views. After 1904 the continuously decreasing group of the Transylvanian MPs did not have an organized movement – apart from a few interpellations and speeches – within the Parliament.

From the 1880s occasionally, from 1901 in a wider economy-supporting system in the framework of the Székely action the Ministry of Commerce encouraged the Székely cottage industry, handicraft, manufacture and education. The 1905 programme planned by the economy development commissioner appointed in 1913, was just partly realised before WW I. In 1906 the Ministry of Justice appointed a Székely section that prepared the necessary measures for rearrangements of the landed properties and the amendment of the land-register system. Darányi Ignác, Minister of Agriculture between 1895-1903 and 1906-1910 launched a comprehensive

and unified economy development programme for the expansion of the economy of the economically underdeveloped areas using central sources. The support of the East-Carpathian Ruten population by the Ruten action in 1897 was followed by the economic and cultural support for the Transylvanian Hungarian population from 1902. These "folk aid actions" turned into intermediary level specialised offices serving for the fulfilment of the agricultural organizational tasks in the areas of Kárpátalja-East-Carpathian areas, Felvidék-North-Carpathian areas, Székelyföld, Bánát, Partium.

On 1st June 1902 in Marosvásárhely a Transylvanian Ministerial Branch-office was founded with independent decision rights and margins serving the modernization of the agriculture in Székelyföld, Transylvania (the areas populated by Székelys and Csángós in Háromszék, Csík, Udvarhely, Maros-Torda, then from 1904 Kisküküllő, Torda-Aranyos and Brassó counties), and from 1908 in some areas of Transylvania (in 58 settlements of Kolozs, Szilágy and Alsófehér, in 1913 divided into two branch-offices in Marosvásárhely and Kolozsvár). The branch office had a permanently increasing financial supply from the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture. The policy of the branch office worked out in 1904 based on the statements - especially the ones regarding the agriculture - of the Tusnád Congress on the one hand declared a simple financial aid, on the other hand by the establishment of profitable institutes as well as economic system it served for the recovery of the area by itself, counting on the selfaid and initiative of the society. During the Székely, Transylvanian action it put the major emphasis on changing the agriculture into a more internal one, the establishment of an economic system based on stockbreeding and the organization of the rural society.

Besides increasing economic knowledge the branch office achieved great success in systematic pasturage economy and water management. The action enlarged the possibilities for living by renewal the area of vineyards, development of fruit- and vegetable growing, cottage industry and apiary. Before 1909 to counteract the emigration the action completed a labour contact function, and before 1905 dealt with the mining, spa baths and the development of the infrastructure.

The scope of the action significantly narrowed during WW I. and then the Romanian occupation. The offices were closed at the end of 1919, but their longterm contribution to the economic development of Székelyföld and the change in the approach of its population is inevitable.

This study is the first monographic summary of the reasons, operation and results of the Székely action based on the printed literature, contemporary (statistical) data, never published - and forgotten - archive sources, and contemporary printed media sources.